

THE RICCARDI
PRESS BOOKS

THE INDIAN STORIES
OF F. W. BAIN. VOL. X
BUBBLES OF THE FOAM

(फेनोपममाचाप्रीति)

So Life's sad Sunset prizes
What Life's gay Dawn despises,
And always Winter wise is
 When Summer is no more :
While Love than lightning fleeter
Turns all he touches sweeter,
To leave it incompleter
 Behind him, than before.

Amara

Years, looking forward, all too slow,
 Yet looking back, too fast,
What is your joy, what is your woe,
But scented ash that used to glow,
A sandalwood of long ago,
 A camphor of the past?

Sulochana

What! Mortal taste Immortal? Earth, kiss Heaven?
Confusion elemental! ah! beware!

Somadewa

BUBBLES OF THE FOAM
TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIG-
INAL MANUSCRIPT BY F. W. BAIN
LONDON: PHILIP LEE WARNER
PUBLISHER TO THE MEDICI
SOCIETY LD. VII GRAFTON
STREET W. MDCCCC
XIV



**First published 1912. Reprinted
in the Riccardi Press Books 1914**

DEDICATED TO LADY GLENCONNER

CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	xi
Bubbles of the Foam	
A Spoiled Child	3
The Thirst of an Antelope	
I. A Dappled Dawn	23
II. A Glamour of Noon	51
III. The Desert and the Night	73

INTRODUCTION

FOUR things are never far from you, in old Hindoo literature: underfoot, all round you, or away on the horizon, there they always are: the Forest, the Desert, the River, and the Hills.

It is never very easy, to understand the Past that really is a past: and the age of Forests, like that of chivalry, is gone. But in the case of ancient India, the chief obstacle to understanding arises from our bad habit of always looking at the map with the North side up. Why this inveterate apotheosis of the North? Would you understand the old Hindoos, you must turn the map of India very nearly upside down, so as to get Peshawar at the bottom, and the Andaman Islands exactly at the top. And then, history lies all before you, right side up, and you get your intellectual bearings, and take in the early situation, at a glance. Entering, like those old nomads, through the Khaibâr, you find yourself suddenly in the Land of Streams: and as you drift along, you go, simply because you must, straight on, down the River 'ganging on' - 'Gangá' - towards the rising sun, 'ahead,' - which is the Sanskrit term for East, - all under the colossal wall of Hills, the home of Snow, where the gods

Introduction

live, on your left - 'uttara,' the North, the heights; - while on the South, - the right hand, 'dakshina,' the Deccan - you are debarred, not by Highlands, but by two not less peremptory rebutters: first, by the Desert, 'Marusthali,' the home of death: and then again, a little farther on, by the Forest of the South: the vast, mysterious, impenetrable Wood, of which the Rāmāyana preserves for us the pioneering record and original idea, with its spell of the Unknown and the Adventure - like the Westward Ho! of a later age - with its Ogres and its Sprites, its sandal trees and lonely lotus-tarns, its armies of ugly little ape-like men, and its legendary Lanka - Ceylon - lost in a kind of halo of shell-born pearls, and gems, and their Ten-headed Devil King, Rāwana, away, away, at the very end of all: so distant, as to be little more than mythical, little better than a dream. No! Those who wish to see things with the eyes of old Hindoos must not begin, as we did, and do still, with Ceylon, and the adjacent coasts of Coromandel and Malabar. That is the wrong, the other end: it is like starting English history from 'the peak in Darien.'

But our particular concern, in these pages, is with the Desert. The conventional notion of a desert, as a colourless and empty flat of sand, is curiously unlike the thing itself, which is a constantly changing, kaleidoscopic sea of colour, made up of rainbow stripes, black, golden, red, dazzling white, and blue, with every kind of lights and shadows, strange hazes, transparencies,

Introduction

and gleams. True, the ground you actually tread upon is bare: but it is clothed with raiment woven by that magic artist, Distance, out of cloud and heat and air and sky. And so, when these old Hindoo people came to make a closer acquaintance with the Desert, so dangerous to enter, so difficult, as Mahmood subsequently found, to cross, they discovered, that over and above the plain prosaic danger, this Waste of Sand laid, like a very demon, goblin snares for the unwary traveller's destruction, in the form of its Mirage. Ignorant of 'optical phenomena,' they gazed at this strange illusion, these phantom trees and water, these mocking semblances of cities that vanished as you reached them, with astonishment, and even awe. It struck their imagination, and they gave to it a name scarcely less poetical than the thing: calling it 'deer-water,' or the 'thirst of the antelope.'¹ Nor was this all. For the apparition was a kind of symbol, made as it were expressly for their own phenomenology: it contained a moral meaning that harmonised precisely with all their philosophical ideas. What could be a better illustration of that 'Mâyá,' that metaphysical Delusion, in which all souls are wrapped, which leads them to impute Reality to the Phantasms, the unsubstantial objects of the senses, and lures them on to moral ruin as they wander in the waste? And accordingly, we find the poets constantly recurring to this

¹ I am told, by a pundit in these matters, that the term is found at least as early as Patanjali - the 'Mahábháshya'; - that is, probably, the latter half of the second century B.C.: and hence, it must have originated long before.

Introduction

'thirst of the gazelle,' as an emblem of the treacherous and bewildering fascination of the fleeting shadows of this lower life - 'ihaloka'; - the beauty that is hollow, the Bubble of the World. And thus, Disappointment is of the essence of Existence: disappointment, which can only come about, when hopes and expectations have been founded on a want of understanding - 'awiweka'; - a blindness, born of Desire, that sets and keeps its unhappy victims hunting, in vain, for what is not to be found.

Especially, essentially, in love: love, which has its origin in Dream, its acme in Ecstasy, and its catastrophe in Disillusion: love, which is life's core and kernel and epitome, the focus and quint-essence of existence. A life that is without it has somehow missed its mark: it is meaningless and plotless, 'a string of casual episodes, like a bad tragedy.' For what, after all, is Love? Who has given an account of it? Plato's fable, which makes Love the child of Satiety and Want, or Poverty and Plenty, is a pretty piece of fancy: it is clever: but like mathematics, an explanation of the brain rather than the heart. Something is missing. For Plato, almost always delicate and subtle, is never tender: the reason is, that he was atrophied on the feminine side: he does not consequently understand sex, being himself only half a man: that is, only man and nothing more. But all the really great imaginative men are bi-sexual: they have a large ingredient of 'woman in their composition, which gives to their divination an extra touch of

Introduction

something that others cannot reach. And so, with equal poetry, yet with a pathos infinitely deeper, our Milton makes Love the child of Loneliness:¹ a parentage evinced by the terrible melancholy of Love when he cannot find his proper object, and the blank desolation and despair of the frightful void and blackness left behind, when he has lost it. But now, it is just this intolerable loneliness which makes him idealise the commonplace, and see all things in the light of his own yearning, creating for himself visions of unimaginable happiness, which presently vanish, to resolve his Eden into nothing, and leave him, with no companion but the horror of his own intensified isolation, in the sand. A situation, which hardly any lover that really is a lover can endure, without going mad. They are very shallow theologians, who by way of pandering to sentimental prejudices make the essence of the Deity to consist in Love. Poor Deity! his life would be a Hell, past all human imagination: an everlasting Loneliness, with no prospect of release. For it is precisely to escape from this hell that so many forlorn lovers take refuge in the tomb: a resource not available to those who cannot die. Death is not always terrible: sometimes he is kind.

Such then is the theme of 'Bubbles of the Foam': a little love-story, whose title, like that of all her elder sisters, has in the original a double application, by reason of the ambiguity of the last word,

¹ In his 'Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce.'

Introduction

to Love, and to the Moon. We might also render it, 'A Heavenly Bubble,' or, 'Love is a Bubble,' or 'Nothing but a Bubble,' or 'A Bubble of the World,' thinking either of Love or the Moon. For the Moon, like the goddess of Love, rose originally from the sea: and they retain traces of their origin, both in their essence and their appearance. For what is more like a great Foam-Bubble than the Moon? and what is more like the delusion of love than a bubble of the foam, so beautiful in its play of colour, while it endures: so evanescent, so hollow, leaving behind it when it bursts and disappears nothing but a memory, and a bitter taste of brine? And as love is but a bubble, so are all its victims merely bubbles of a bubble: for this also is mirage.

Mirage! mirage! That is the keynote of the old melancholy Indian music; the bass, whose undertone accompanies, with a kind of monotonous solemnity, all the treble variations in the minor key. The world is unreal, a delusion and a snare; sense is deception, happiness a dream; nothing has true being, is absolute, but virtue, the sole reality; that which most emphatically 'is,'¹ attainable only through knowledge, the great illumina-

¹ I was sorely tempted to give it the title of 'Mere Foam': which, if the reader would kindly understand 'mere' in its German, its Russian, its Latin, and its ordinary English sense, would be an exact translation. But it has an unfortunate suggestion - 'meerschäum' - which made it impossible.

² 'Sat.' The thesis of Socrates, that virtue is knowledge: probably borrowed, by steps that we cannot trace, through Pythagoras or 'Orpheus' from the East.

Introduction

tor, the awakener to the perception of the truth. We move, like marionettes, pulled by the strings of our forgotten antenatal deeds, in a magic cage, or Net, of false and hypocritical momentary seemings: and bitter disappointment is the inevitable doom of every soul, that with passion for its guide in the gloom, thinks to find in the shadows that surround it any substance, any solid satisfaction; any permanent in the mutable; any rest in the ceaseless revolution; any peace which the world cannot give. Who would have peace, must turn his back upon the world; it lies the Other Way. Three are the Ways: the Way of the World, the Way of Woman, the Way of Emancipation.

Does anyone in Europe care about this last, this Way of Emancipation? No: it is Liberty that preoccupies the European, who about a century ago seemed, like the old Athenian, suddenly to catch sight of Liberty in a dream.¹ And yet, who knows? For Europe also is disappointed: there seems, after all, to be something lacking to this Liberty, something wrong. With her Utopias ending in blind alleys, or issues unforeseen: with her sages discovered to be less sages than they seemed: with her Science turning superstitious, her Literature wallowing in the gutter, and her women descending from the pedestal of sex to play the virago in the contamination of the crowd: with so many other things, not here to be considered, to raise a doubt, whether this Liberty is taking her just where she wished to go, what wonder if even

¹ ὅταν ἐλευθερίας ὁρῶντας. Plutarch.

Introduction

Europe should begin to meditate on means of emancipation, even if only from vulgarity, and steal a furtive glance or two towards the East, to see, whether, by diligently raking in the ashes of ancient oriental creeds, she might not discover here and there a spark, at which to rekindle the expiring candle of her own. For there seems to be some curious indestructible 'asbestos,' some element of perennial, imperturbable tranquillity and calm, away in India, which is conspicuous only by its absence, in the worry of the West. Where does it come from? What does it consist in? Is there a secret which India has discovered, which Europe cannot guess? Is there anything in it, after all, but barbaric superstition, destined to fade away and disappear, in the sunrise of omniscience?

I cannot tell: but well I recollect a fugitive impression left on me by an early morning in Benares, now many years ago. I threaded its extraordinary streets, narrower than the needle's eye, and crowded with strange, lithe, nearly naked human beings, with black, straight, long wet hair, and brown shining skins, jostled at every step by holy bulls or cows, roaming at their own sweet will with large placid lustrous eyes, in an atmosphere heavy with the half-delicious, half-repulsive odour of innumerable flowers, mostly yellow, that lay about everywhere in heaps, fresh and rotten, till I came out finally upon the river bank. A light steamy mist, converted by the low sun's horizontal rays into a kind of reddish-golden veil, hung in

Introduction

the quiet air, lending an almost magical effect to the long row of great temples, whose steps run down into the river, along the northern bank : half of them in ruins, and looking as if they must presently slide away into the water and disappear. And as I floated slowly down, I watched with curiosity, half wondering if I was dreaming, the throng of devotees, sitting, lying, gliding here and there, like an antique procession on an old Greek frieze or vase ; some muttering and praying, others bathing, others again standing motionless as statues in the stream, buried in a sort of 'samádhi' meditation : every outline of every attitude, in that clear Indian air, as sharp as if cut with scissors out of paper. And lying close beside, cheek by jowl with the bodies still alive, the ashes of dead bodies just burned or still burning on the Ghát. Life and Death touching, running into one another, and nobody amazed : all as it should be, and a matter of course !

England and India, bureaucracy, democracy, sedition, education, politics and Durbars :—the world with all its tumult and its roaring passes clean over their heads, unheeded, unobserved : for them the noise and bustle do not matter, do not trouble : they do not hear, they do not listen, they do not even care. It is curious, this peace, this indifference, this calm : it does not seem reality ; it is like a thing looked at in a picture, like a dream. And, somehow, as I gazed at it, mechanically there came into my mind, as it were of its own accord, a story I had read in some old navigator's

Introduction

'yarn,' of the albatross, sleeping on the great South Sea, in the fury of a storm, with its head beneath its wing.

Ceylon, 1912

BUBBLES OF THE FOAM

A SPOILED CHILD

BENEDICTION

‘A bow to the mystical evening dance of the Rider on the Mouse,’ who whirling round his elephant trunk, smeared with wet vermillion, suddenly shoots it straight up into the purple sky, and stands for a single instant still, poised in the yellow twilight, as if to make a coral handle for the white umbrella of the laughing Moon.’

CHAPTER I

THERE is, in the western quarter, a land of lonely desolation, that resembles a very sea, but of sand instead of brine, and rightly named Marusthali, being a very home of death, sending back to the midday sun rays hotter than his own, and challenging the midnight sky, with silent ashy laughter, as though to say: What am I but the rival and reflection of thyself, with bones instead of stars, and tracks of wasted skeletons instead of a Milky Way. And there, upon a day, it came about that Maheshwara was roaming with Párwati in his arms. And as they floated swiftly on, over the dusty waste, they watched their own huge shadows sweeping like the forms of clouds across the burning sand, exactly underneath, for it was noon: and the surface of the desert shook and quivered in the stillness, as if the wind, asleep,

¹ Ganesha.

Bubbles of the Foam

had, like a tired traveller, sought refuge from the fury of the sun above their heads. And all at once, the Daughter of the Snow exclaimed: See, there is the mirage! Let us descend, and sit for a little while upon the sand: for I love to watch this wonder, which resembles in its far faint blue the colour of a dream. And accordingly, to do her pleasure, Maheshwara sank softly to the earth, settling on it like a cloud gently resting on a hill.

So as they looked, after a while, that slender goddess said again: Surely it is a shame, and well may the poor antelopes be mistaken and deceived. For who could believe yonder water to be only an illusion? And when the eyes of even gods are bewildered by the cheat, how much more the eyes of thirsty and unreflecting little deer!

Then the Moony-crested deity said slowly: O Daughter of the Snow, thy own reflection on this beautiful illusion is the truth. And yet, well were it for the world, were its illusion limited only to its eyes, not extending, as it actually does, to its understanding also. For this deceptive picture on the sand is far inferior in power and importance to the bewildering delusion of this world below, fluttering about whose shifting dancing light, like moths about a wind-blown torch, men singe their silly souls, and burning off their wings, drop helpless, maimed and mutilated, into the black gulf of birth and death, and lose emancipation; till, after countless ages, their wings begin to sprout and grow again, under the influence of works. Yet they who after all emerge, and soar away, unbur-

A Spoiled Child

dened even by an atom of the guilt that weighs them down, and brings them back into the vortex of rebirth, are very few. And yonder bones, now lying in the sand, could they but rise and speak, would be a proof of what I say.

And the goddess looked, and saw, close by, a little heap of bones, that lay half-buried in the sand. And she said with curiosity: Whose are the bones, and how are they a proof of thy consideration?

And Maheshwara replied: These are bones, not of a man, but of a camel, that perished in the desert long ago. For into this body of a camel fell the soul of which I spoke, in punishment of crimes committed in the birth before, in the body of a man; who, blinded by passion, slew three of his fellow mortals; as, if thou wilt, I will tell thee while we sit, watching the illusion of the senses, that so closely represents the illusion of the souls of the lovers in the tale.

CHAPTER II

KNOW, then, that once upon a time, long ago, all the gods had assembled in the hall of Indra's palace, to listen to a singing competition that took place among the Gandharwas. And all sat listening attentively, till at length, all at once, came a pause in the performance. And in the silence, while all the heavenly singers rested, it so fell out, by the decree of destiny, that the flowery-arrowed god,¹ striving to recollect a

¹ i.e. the god of love, Kāmadewa.

Bubbles of the Foam

cadence that had pleased him, hummed it, as well as he could, over again, aloud; and like the unskilful imitator that he was, played havoc with his model, stumbling at the quarter tones, and singing flat. And out of delicacy and politeness, the gods all turned away their faces, hiding their smiles, except Brahmá,¹ whose face never moved. But Kámadewa, looking up suddenly, caught the vestige of a smile, hovering, just before it disappeared, on the corner of the lips of Saraswati, as if it were unwilling to leave a resting-place so unutterably sweet as that lovely lady's mouth. And instantly, he turned red and pale alternately, with rage that followed shame: so little does he who delights in making others blush like doing it himself. And suddenly taking fire, he cried aloud: Ha! dost thou turn me into ridicule, O thou malapert blue-stock-ing?² Then will I curse thee for thy pains. Fall instantly into a lower birth, and suffer anguish in the form of a mortal woman, for thy presumption and ill-mannered mirth.

And instantly, all the other gods, hearing him, broke out into a very storm of indignation. And buzzing like infuriated bees around one who seeks to rob them of their honey, they swarmed about that god of love, exclaiming all together: What!

¹ It would have been useless for Brahmá to turn away his face, since he has four; one on every side. ² 'Kupanditá,' the exact equivalent of our word. Saraswati is the Hindoo Pallas Athene; with this distinction in her favour, that she is as gentle as the Greek lady is the reverse. The 'flava virago' of Ovid becomes in India a lotus white and pure as her own celestial smile.

A Spoiled Child

shall Heaven be bereft, even for a very little while, of the very crest-jewel of its brow, because of thy loss of self-control, and a fault on her part which was not a fault at all, but only the appropriate reproof of thy ill-advised endeavour to play the musician without possessing the necessary skill? And there arose a tumult in the hall; and finally, they made me arbitrator to settle the dispute, knowing that Ananga was afraid of me, as well might he be.¹ And so, after all were silent, I spoke. And I said, very slowly: O bender of that bow, whose string is a row of bees, thou art surely altogether inexcusable, first for thy singing, and secondly for thy loss of temper, and finally for thy curse. For who could be so harsh as to strike Saraswati, even with a 'shirisha' petal? But now, the mischief is utterly beyond repair, and once spoken, the curse cannot be recalled.² And whether she will or no, she must now go to earth, and leave us for a time, till thy curse has spent its force. And yet, for all that, it is not right that the doer of injustice such as thine should escape scot-free. Therefore now I will give thee curse for curse, and thou shalt eat the fruit of thy own tree. Fall then, immediately into the body of a man, and suffer that mortality which thou hast laid upon Saraswati. And thy fortune shall be interwoven with her own, so that thy curse shall be determined by the quality and period of hers.

¹ Because Maheshwara had burned him, on a previous occasion, with fire from his eye.

² In these and similar ideas, the Hindoos resembled the ancient Romans: the letter was decisive and irremediable, 'utilingua nuncupassit, ita jusesto.'

Bubbles of the Foam

And then, as he listened to my doom, Kámadewa turned paler than the ashes to which I had reduced him long ago, finding himself punished for his insolence by me, for the second time. But the gods all exclaimed, with approbation and delight: Victory to Maheshwara! who has once more bitten the biter, and condemned him, by a sentence even more merciful than he deserved. For what could be more intolerable than even Heaven without Saraswati, unless it be the curse that is about to produce such a melancholy condition of affairs?

And then, those two deities disappeared suddenly from Heaven, and descended to be born as man and woman on the earth.¹

CHAPTER III

NOW just at that very moment, it happened, that there were living in the desert two Rajpoots of the race of the Moon; and the name of the one was Bimba, and that of the other, Jaya.² And Saraswati was born as the daughter of the wife of Bimba, while Kámadewa was born as the son of the wife of Jaya. Now Bimba was a king: and Jaya was his cousin on the mother's side. And very soon afterwards, Jaya set upon his cousin, laying claim to the throne, and driving him away,

¹ This exordium, which has points of resemblance with that of the insufferable Bána's 'Harsha-charita,' is only the Hindoo method of declaring that the two characters presently to be brought upon the scene are mortal incarnations of love and charm: as we call a man, an Adonis, or a woman, a Venus. ² i.e. 'the disc of the moon,' and 'victory.' Pronounce 'Jaya' to rhyme with 'eye.'

A Spoiled Child

took his kingdom, and kept it for himself. And he caught the wife of Bimba, and put her to death, as he would have done also with her daughter and her husband. But Bimba succeeded in escaping with his daughter, and ran away and hid himself. So Jaya remained in triumph, reigning over the kingdom, whose capital stood on the very spot on which we are sitting now. For the kingdoms of the earth come and go upon it, like the shadows of the clouds: and they grow up suddenly like grass, and perish a little later, and vanish clean away, leaving behind them absolutely nothing but mounds, such as those now lying all about thee, and fragments of recollections, and half-forgotten names, like the dreams of the night which morning obliterates and drives away, vaguely hanging in its memory like wreaths of mist curling and twisting on the black still surface of a pool in some dark valley screened from the early sun by one of thy father's¹ peaks.

And of all the elements that made up Jaya's good fortune, there was not one which filled him with such pride and exultation as his son. And he looked upon him as the very fruit of his birth in visible form, little dreaming, that could he but have looked into the future, and seen what was coming, he would rather have deemed himself more fortunate to live and die without any son at all, than to have begotten such a son as he actually had. For sons resemble winds, which sometimes lift their families like clouds to heaven, and sometimes dash them to the earth, like hail.

¹ i.e. the Himālaya.

Bubbles of the Foam

For having waited so long to get a son at all, till hope was all but gone, the joy of both his parents, when he actually arrived, was so extravagantly great, that they could not make too much of him. And as he grew up, they spoiled him so completely, by the want of all discretion in their admiration and the flattery of their affectionate caresses, that after a while he became utterly intolerable, even to themselves. And this came about, not only by reason of their own foolishness, but also by the very disposition and qualities of that son himself. For he was so marvellously beautiful, that every time they saw him, they could hardly believe their own eyes, and were ready to abandon the body out of joy. And in the intoxication of delight they gave him the name of Atirupa,¹ which was no more than he deserved. And he became a byword and a wonder in the world, till the heart of his mother almost broke with the swelling of its own pride. For nothing like him had ever been seen by anybody, even in a dream, since his beauty did not in the least resemble that of other men, but hovered as it were half-way between one sex and the other, as if the Creator when he made him, unable to decide, whether to make of him a man or a woman, had combined, by some miracle of omnipotence and skill, the fascinations of the two. For though he was tall, and strong, yet strange! his body and his limbs were rounded, and delicately shaped, and slender, with soft and

¹ i.e. 'of extraordinary and surpassing beauty.' Pronounce 'Uttirupa.'

A Spoiled Child

tender hands and feet that were almost too small, even for a girl : and as he moved, he fell as if by accident into attitudes that as it were imitated unconsciously the careless grace of Shri,¹ caught unaware when she thinks that there is nobody to look at her, and carved by a cunning sculptor in stone upon a temple wall ; so that the eyes of all followed him as if against their will, drawn to him by an involuntary admiration that they could not understand, not realising that in his case only, the beauty of their own sex was reinforced, and as it were, reduplicated with the magic of a spell, by the mysterious and additional fascination of the other. And his face was so strange that whoever saw it, started, and fell, after a little while, into a kind of dream. And yet this was not merely by reason of its beauty, though that beauty was excessive, resembling a vision seen suddenly in the water by a Dryad, musing at midnight by a moonlit pool, with eyes that resembled the reflections of the shadows of the lotuses, and eyebrows that met together, in the middle of his brow, each drawn exactly in imitation of the other, like a lotus-fibre half in and half out of water, and lips that were almost too red, resembling that love-sick nymph's own pair of 'bimba' lips, mirrored² in the clear black water, and dying to be kissed by others like themselves. But wonderful ! the Creator had put into his face some ingredient of recollection, so

¹ The Hindoo Aphrodite.

² There is here an untranslatable play on 'bimba,' the fruit, - as we say, cherry lip - and 'pratibimba,' a reflection in the water.

Bubbles of the Foam

that without knowing why, every beholder found himself plunged, as it were, into the agitation of dreamy reminiscence, and said within himself: Ha! now, somewhere or other, in this birth or another, I have seen that miracle of a face before. And each went away with a heart that was unwilling to depart, haunted as it were by dim desire for something he knew not what stirring in the depths of his memory, that he could not remember and yet had not forgotten, like the thirst for the repetition of the sweetness of a bygone dream.¹ And all the more, because his voice resembled a music that was playing a melody suggested by the theme of his face. For it was low and soft, like that of a woman, and yet deep, like that of a man: and it seemed to be made of sound stolen from the pipe of Krishna, in order to enable it itself to steal away the senses of the world: so that as he spoke, the listener gradually grew bewildered by its tone, resembling a tired traveller, falling little by little unconsciously to sleep as he sits in the murmur of a mountain stream. And whenever he chose, he could cajole his hearer, and make him do almost anything whatever, so hard was it to resist the irresistible persuasion that lurked, like the caressing touch of a gentle woman's hand, in the tone of that quiet and insinuating voice.

And yet, all this beauty was nothing but a mask, and a lie: and so far from expressing the nature of that soul which it covered and disguised, it actually added evil to its original defect; and he re-

¹ All this depends on an elaborate play on the double mean-

A Spoiled Child

sembled a bamboo, looking like a very incarnation of loveliness and symmetry outside, and singing in the wind, and yet absolutely hollow and without a heart, within. For from the very moment he was born, he did exactly as he pleased, and nothing else, being as capricious as the breeze that blows only as it chooses. For beginning with his parents, nobody ever crossed him, or placed any obstacle whatever in the path of his desires, which grew up accordingly like a very rank jungle impervious to the light, in which his will wandered like a wild young tiger-cub, wayward, and passionate, and absolutely uncontrolled. And he gave in to others, and was guided by them, in one point only, and that was in their extravagant admiration of himself. For finding others worship him, he fell in with their opinion, and followed their example: and became as it were the devotee at the shrine of his own beauty, making it a deity to which every other thing or body was only fitted to be sacrificed. And he filled his rooms with mirrors of many colours, made of crystal and lapis-lazuli, and polished gold and silver, and the water of tanks whose slabs were of marble of every variety of hue; and he used to sit alone, when he had nothing else to do, for hours, watching his own image that seemed to offer him reciprocally worship as he watched it, as if it were doubtful which of the two, the reality or its reflection, was the deity, and which the devotee.

And gradually the world with all its objects ing of 'Smara,' a name for the God of Love, which means 'memory' as well as 'love.'

Bubbles of the Foam

came to appear in his eyes as nothing but a playground, and all its men and women merely his own animated toys. And from being utterly indifferent to everything but his own momentary pleasure and caprice, he became, little by little, first callous to the sufferings of others, and finally positively cruel, finding his amusement in making others victims to his own peremptory desires. And his appetite, like a fire, grew with the fuel that it fed upon, till it resembled voracity, and an intolerable thirst for more. But as long as he remained still a child, the fire, remaining as it were without its proper aliment, lay hidden: till he grew into a man. And then, all at once, it blazed out furiously like a very conflagration, striking terror into all the subjects of the kingdom, and threatening to consume them all, like forest trees and grass.

For whereas, till then, the fury of his self-will had been scattered, for want of concentration¹ on one object only, manhood, like a flash of lightning, suddenly revealed to him that very object, in the form of woman: and he discovered, in the storm of his delight, that women were the very victims for whom he had been blindly groping in the darkness all his life. And he threw himself upon them, like a prey, finding with intoxication that the Creator had framed him as a weapon constructed wholly for their destruction. And he said to himself, in triumph: I am, as it seems, a magnetic gem, omnipotent and irresistible, to whose attraction

‘Yoga.’ The germ of truth, and it is a large one, in the phil-

A Spoiled Child

the entire sex succumbs inevitably, like grass. And this opinion was justified by the conduct of the women themselves. For every woman that set eyes on him, no matter who she was, fell instantly, like a stone dropped into a well without a bottom, into the abyss of infatuation, and utterly forgot not only her relations and her home, but her honour and herself and everything in the three worlds, seized as it were by the very frenzy of devotion, and anxious only to immolate herself as a victim on the altar of his divinity. And strange! though he treated them all as more worthless than grass, throwing them away almost in the instant that he saw them, not one of them all ever took warning by the fate of her predecessors: and so far were they from shunning him as the common enemy of their entire sex, that on the contrary, they seemed to struggle with one another for the prize of his momentary affection, the more, the more openly he derided them; as if even his derision and the cheapness in which he openly held them, increased the power of his charm. Ha! very wonderful is the contradiction in the heart of a woman, and bitter the irony of the Creator that fashioned it out of so curious an antagonism! For she flies to the man who makes light of her, as if pulled by a cord: while she utterly despises the man who thinks himself nothing in comparison with her: saying as it were, by her own behaviour, that she is absolutely worthless in her own esteem.

osophy of 'Yoga' is the doctrine, which is proved by all experience, that 'concentration' is the secret of mastery.

Bubbles of the Foam

CHAPTER IV

SO then, after a while, the heart of King Jaya broke within him. For he became odious in the eyes of all his subjects by reason of the behaviour of his son, who paid no more regard to his admonitions than a mad elephant does to a rope of grass. And he died, consumed by the two fires of a burning fever and a devouring grief: and his wife followed him through the flames of yet another fire, as if to say: I will die no other death than his own.

And when the funeral obsequies had been completed, there came a day, soon after, when Atirupa was sitting in his palace, with some of his attendants round him, gazing at his own image, that was reflected in a tiny mirror set on his finger in a ring. And he was plunged in the contemplation of himself, shadowed by a melancholy that arose, not from grief at the loss of his parents, but dejection caused by the gloom of the period of mourning: and as he sat, he said within himself: I am losing time, and growing old, and letting the opportunity slip by me unimproved, and this bloom of mine is wasted, and, as it were, lying idle, for want of its proper mirror, which is not this ring, but a pair of new eyes, which would look back at my own, not as this does, vacantly and without a soul, but lit up by the soft lustre of passion and admiration. And all at once, he started up, and exclaimed aloud: What! do ye all sit easily, when I am dying for lack of recreation? Know ye not that even the

A Spoiled Child

jackal is in danger, when the lion is left without a prey? Even now I am debating with myself, whether it would not be a good thing to have one of you chosen by lot, and trampled by an elephant, to be a lesson to the rest.

And then, as they all gazed at him with anxiety, each fearing for himself, he looked at their confusion, as if with enjoyment, and said again: What, with so many idle all about me, am I, forsooth, to sit waiting, for fortune to come to me, like an 'abhisariká,' of her own accord? Nay, it were well enough, could I even see coming towards me an abhisariká of any kind. But the women of this city grow, as it seems, older and more ugly every day: for I have skimmed its cream, and now nothing is left but curd, and dregs, and whey, and like the ocean after its churning, all its treasures are exhausted, leaving nothing but crocodiles and monsters, and bitterness, and brine.

So then, wishing to cajole him, one of them replied: Maháráj, were this city as full of beauties as the very sea of gems, how could any one of them come to thee in broad daylight? For is it not laid down in all the Shástras, that even an abhisariká,¹ were she dying for her lover, must notwithstanding observe times and seasons, choosing for her expedition only proper opportunities, such as are afforded by a winter night, or a dense fog, or

¹ There is a ludicrous pedantry about the elaborate categories of Hindoo sages: they make grammatical rules even for every department of erotics: as if it were necessary for ladies to learn the grammar of the subject, before they could make love!

Bubbles of the Foam

the confusion caused by a whirlwind or an earthquake or an uproar, or a revolution in the state, or an illness of the king, or a festival, when all the citizens are drunk, or sleeping, or when the city is on fire. But as it is, not one of these occasions is present, to enable her to come to thee escaping observation. And a woman of good family is very different from a dancing girl. For when she leaves her home, on such an assignation, she wraps herself up, disguising her identity, and creeps along timidly making herself small, wishing even darkness darker, in addition to the screen provided by all the other circumstances that favour her attempt.

And Atirupa said: There is no difficulty in this: for could I think that there was even one woman in the city awaiting such an opportunity, who was worthy of it, I would very soon oblige her, by burning the city to the ground, reducing it to ashes for her convenience and my own.

And all at once, one answered from behind, who had entered as he spoke, unobserved: Ha! Maháráj, then, as it seems, I am come in the very nick of time, to save thy city from such a miserable end.

And Atirupa turned, and exclaimed joyfully: Ha! Chamu,¹ art thou returned? I was beginning to think thee lost, like a stone dropped to the very bottom of the sea. And Chamu said: Thou art right: for I am like the oyster, and contain a pearl.

And he looked at Atirupa, and laughed, rub-

¹ Pronounce 'Chummoo.'

A Spoiled Child

bing his hands together, with cunning in his eyes, that resembled those of a weasel. And he said: Maháráj, as I entered, I heard thee wishing for Shrī¹ to visit thee in the form of an abhisariká; and lo! here she is, in my form. And do not despise her, on account of my deformity: for Shrī is a lady, and capricious, and comes in strange disguises. Thou knowest, that the city being dismal by reason of the obsequies, I seized my opportunity, and went away on a visit to my maternal uncle, who lives far off in a village in the wood that lies in the eastern quarter. And on my journey back, I lost my way in the wood, and went astray: and finally, growing very tired, I lay down in a thicket. And as I rested, after a while, I heard voices coming in my direction. And lying hidden, I looked out, and watched the speakers, till one of them, as I think, caught sight of my face among the trees, and took fright at its ugliness, and went away with his companion. And afterwards I rose myself and came away; and now, here I am.

And Atirupa looked at him, with disappointment: and he said: O Chamu, is this thy story, and is this all?

And Chamu laughed softly, and he said: Maháráj, he is a sage, who knows where to stop. But I will have compassion on thy curiosity, and this much I will tell thee in addition, that one of the speakers was a woman. And yet I am not sure about it, for if there is another woman like her in

¹ The goddess of Fortune and Beauty. She is the very incarnation of the abhisariká, since she comes of her own accord.

Bubbles of the Foam

the three worlds, I will cut off my own head, and give to thee as a footstool, since it is fit for absolutely nothing else. And even as it is, I think, after all, that I must have fallen asleep in the clump of bushes, and seen her in a dream: compounding for myself a vision out of old memories of Ap-sarases and Yakshinis, and Nágás, and fragments of old fairy tales and stories that my mother told me long ago, when I was a child.

And Atirupa looked at him with surprise: and he said: Chamu, this is very strange, and thou art not like thyself. Hast thou been eating poppy,¹ or art thou only drunk with wine? For it is no ordinary vision that could turn thee into a poet. Come now, go on. Describe for me the beauty that has awoken such emotion in a soul as dull and muddy as thy own.

And Chamu said: O Maháráj, who can describe the indescribable? There are things that cannot be described, but only seen: hardly even then to be believed, when gazed at by the eye. Can anything imitate and reproduce the beauty of the blue lotus, but the pool in which it is reflected? The wandering wind may carry, like myself, its fragrance to a distance, but cannot perform the work that belongs only to the mirror of the pool. So take counsel of the wind, and go thyself, and become the pool.

¹ 'Ahiphena,' 'snake-foam,' said by Udoy Chand Dutt in his 'Materia Medica Indica' to be derived from the Arabic 'af-yoon,' as it was apparently unknown in India before the Musulman invasion.

A Spoiled Child

And Atirupa laughed joyfully, and he exclaimed: O Chamu, thou art certainly bewitched, and this wood-nymph has cast over thee a spell: turning thee into a very breeze of sandal-wood from Malaya.

And Chamu said: Laugh, Maháráj: and as I told thee it would be, so it is: thou dost not believe. But when thou hast seen her eyes, and when thou hast heard her voice, and when thou hast gazed at her, as I did, coming straight towards thee, walking, thou wilt laugh no longer: for the scorn incarnate in the pride of her great breast will make thee giddy, and the roundness of her hips will steal thy heart and burn it to a cinder, and the jingle of her anklets will haunt thy ears, as it does mine, like the sound of a stream, keeping time to the dance of her two little feet as they come towards thee, till thou wilt find thyself wishing that some strange magic might keep on drawing thee back for ever, so only that thou couldst go on gazing, as she kept on coming, like an everlasting incarnation of the rapture of anticipation of touching and caressing what it maddens thee to see. Maháráj, I tell thee, that were the three great worlds but one colossal oyster shell, she is its very pearl. And like a cunning diver, I have been down into the sea, and seen it, and now I can take thee where it is, to see it for thyself. And as I think, thou wilt discover, she is a quarry to thy taste, who will save thee from the necessity of seeking for others in the ashes of thy town.

THE THIRST OF AN ANTELOPE: I. A DAPPLED DAWN

I

Gazelle, gazelle, dost understand
Why the old skulls grin in this silent land?
My feet are fleet, and I drink at will,
There is something blue in the distance still.

II

But the old skulls grin in the silent waste,
Gazelle, gazelle, make haste, make haste!
I travel fast, and I fear no ill,
There is something blue in the distance still.

III

The old skulls grinned in the silent sand,
They beckoned her like a bony hand:
Gazelle, gazelle, hast drunk thy fill?
Is there something blue in the distance, still?

Kurangi

A DAPPLED DAWN

CHAPTER I

NOW in the meanwhile Bimba, when his cousin drove him off his throne, had fled away to the eastern quarter, taking his daughter with him. And he took up his home in the forest, and there he lived, in a little hut on the side of a hill, just where the desert ended, and the trees of the wood began, having fallen from the state of a King to that of a fugitive and a hunter, living by the chase and the fruits of the forest trees, and drinking streams instead of wine. And so he continued to live, year by year, mourning for his wife, and bitterly hating his cousin, disgusted with the world, with no companion but his daughter. And gradually, as time went on, he utterly forgot his kingdom and all his former life, growing ever fonder of the forest that he lived in, and saying to himself: Now is the wood become my wife, since my other wife is gone.¹ And the only thing that matters now is the daughter that she left behind, as if to keep my memory green of what she was herself. So now, then, I will change her name, lest some day in the future it should

¹ An untranslatable play on 'darí,' wood, and 'sundarí,' a beautiful woman.

Bubbles of the Foam

betray her to my cousin: for her name would be a clue, leading to her destruction. And as a rule, to lose a name is the same thing as to disappear, and die, and be forgotten. So she shall die, as Alipriyá, to be reborn as Aranyáni. And what does the title matter? For the bees will love her just as well, by one name as the other.¹

So then Aranyáni grew up alone with her father in the forest, with her identity disguised, turned as it were from a queen into a woodman's daughter, and lying hidden and unknown, like a pearl in an ocean shell. And yet she resembled fire, that refuses to be concealed, betraying its true nature through no matter what envelops it, and shining through, by chinks and holes, the wrapping that would hide it, even when it does not burn. For brought up in the forest though she was, and half alone, since her father often left her by herself, all day long, yet strange to say! the rudeness of her wild condition ran over her, leaving her soul untouched, like the water running in crystal drops that beautify but do not wet the neck of a royal swan. And one day she was discovered like a treasure in the wood by a band of hermits' daughters, that were roaming at a distance from the hermitage, away in the forest's heart. And those daughters of the sages all fell suddenly in love with her at once, not only for her eyes, that reminded them of the deer that were their playmates in their home, but still more for the strange and wild

¹ 'Alipriyá,' 'beloved of the bees,' a name of the trumpet flower, 'Bignonia suaveolens.' 'Aranyáni,' a forest goddess,

A Dappled Dawn

sweetness of her soul, that resembled absolutely nothing but itself. And every now and then, they used to come and play with her, when they rambled in the wood, telling her innumerable stories which they heard from their fathers, those mines of sacred wisdom. And then, very soon, those daughters of the hermits found, to their amazement, that they resembled fools, pouring water into a well. For she remembered everything when she had only heard it once,¹ and meditating over it alone, not only squeezed out of its mango all the juice which it contained, but planted its kernel like a seed of heavenly wisdom in her heart, and watering it with her own imagination, turned it presently into a new and strange tree, loaded with peculiar flowers and fruits of its own: so that as she grew gradually up, she resembled a receptacle of the essence of old lore, mixed with a native and original savour of herself. Ha! very wonderful indeed are the influences that rise up out of a former birth, since even in this lower form of a hunter's daughter the nature of that incomparable goddess overflowed, like a holy sap in the dark heart of a forest tree, and welled out abundantly, till it covered the coarse bark with fragrant buds and shoots, and flowers of immortal scent and hue.

nymph, or dryad. Pronounce 'Urrun-nyání.' ¹ 'Ekash-rutadhará.' This word exhibits the opinion entertained by the Hindoos as to the close connection existing between a powerful intellect and a retentive memory. Such a quality indicates the highest kind of pundit: and it should be recollected that Saraswatí is the divinity of wisdom, the pundit par excellence.

Bubbles of the Foam

For her body kept pace with the progress of her soul, as if out of rivalry and jealousy unwilling to lag behind it, in the acquisition of ornaments and graces. And having no other models, it found itself obliged to imitate the objects that made up the atmosphere and soil in which it grew: till at last the deer and the blue lotuses gazed upon her eyes, and the red fruits and 'gunjá' berries at her lips, and the creepers at her arms, with envy and amazement: and the 'tamála' shadows turned pale when they looked at her hair, and the trunks of the 'nyagrodha' trees despaired, gazing at the curve of her waist as it sank into the outline of her heavy hips, and the swans and the elephants blushed with shame to see her walk, and the gourds swelled till they burst with jealousy, unable to rival the protuberance of those two disdainful sisters, her inimitable breasts, and the bees grew mad, as if intoxicated with honey sweeter than their own, at the fragrance that floated from the flower of her mouth.

And then strange! just at the very moment when she turned from a child into a woman, there came over her a change, that resembled the presence of a single overhanging cloud in the ruby crystal of a clear pale dawn. For though her father told her something of her story and his own, yet he never told her all, whetting all the more her curiosity by what he did not tell, which like a hidden secret she strove to discover for herself by means of the careless hints that fell every now and then from his mouth unawares, like clues. And the thought that

A Dappled Dawn

she was the daughter of a King flitted in her mind, and appeared to disappear continually, coming and going, as often as she sat musing in the twilight, like the bats in the shadows of the surrounding dusk. And she mixed this conviction with the rosy hope of the dawn of her own maidenhood, and with visions which she would blush like that dawn to avow even to herself, and with fictions of her own imagination that was filled with old legends and stories, and she brooded over a future that was suggested by the past till it turned into a dream, half pleasant and half melancholy for want of its unlikelihood, that haunted her, and never left her, resembling the colour of the blue shadow that hovers on the pure snow of thy father's¹ western slopes, just before the coming of the early sun. For though she was unaware of it herself, she was plunged in the loneliness of sex, arising from the dim yearning of her as yet untouched affection, and longing for the thing that every maiden waits for, like the night, in the form of a lover, to burst out suddenly into red emotion and an ecstasy of joy. And sometimes, as she sat alone dreaming, and gazing as she loved to do out into the desert, that stretched away below the hill she lived on towards the setting sun, visions of the kings and princes and lovers of her stories assembling in crowds at her own 'Swayamwara,'² floated with

¹ Sc. the Himālaya.

² The old epics are full of stories of these gatherings, held to enable the daughters of Kings to choose their own husbands. The story of the marriage in Herodotus, about which Hippocleides did not care, is one of the few parallels in the west.

Bubbles of the Foam

indistinct and unimaginable beauty in the blue haze of the sand, with an intoxicating fascination that almost took away her breath, till she was amazed and even frightened to find her own heart furiously beating, and shaking into agitation the wave of that bosom which there was nobody to see, as if it was ashamed of her and angry with itself.

And yet, with the exception of her father, she had never seen any man but one, who entered into her forest life merely like one of its trees, for she had been accustomed to see him, every now and then, ever since she was a child. And this was a young woodman, who lived a long way off in the wood. And he used to go hunting with her father, who had found him in the forest: and he came every now and then to see them, since her father was pleased with him, for his good nature and simplicity, resembling as it did the clearness of a stream. And he was as tall as a 'shala' tree, and very strong, and very brown and hairy, and though his name was Babhru,¹ yet her father always called him Bruin,² and Aranyáni knew him first only by the nickname: for when she was a child, he used to play with her, as often as he came. And so as she grew up, she looked upon him always with the eyes of a child, never even dreaming that her own alteration might produce any alteration in himself: as it did. For little by little, as her beauty grew, so did his affection; till at last it turned into a passion-

¹ Tawny: reddish brown. Pronounce 'Bub-bhroo.'

² 'Achcha,' a corruption of 'Riksha,' just as we say 'Bruin' instead of 'Bear.'

A Dappled Dawn

ate devotion, that remained notwithstanding absolutely pure, and free from any taint of evil, like the soil in which it grew. And finally, he could not keep away from her. And he came oftener and oftener to see them, till her father was on the very point of forbidding him to come. And then, suddenly, Babhru asked him, to give Aranyáni to him as a wife.

And Bimba looked at him, as if struck by the very thunderbolt of astonishment, for though he was fond of Babhru, yet the idea of such a son-in-law was so outrageous that it had never even occurred to him at all. And like a flash of lightning, he suddenly became aware of his daughter's own attraction, and the danger of the proximity of butter to the fire. And though utterly despising Babhru for a son-in-law, he could not tell him why. Therefore he banished him altogether, and not only would not give him Aranyáni, but actually forbade him to see her any more: as it were returning upon Babhru the thunderbolt that had fallen on himself: so that that unhappy son-in-law came within a little of abandoning the body, for grief and amazement, and remorse, at ever having asked a question that had produced so terrible a consequence, the very opposite of that at which it aimed. For even to forsake the society of Bimba was a grief to him, since he loved him and looked up to him as a dog does to his master. But the thought of losing that of Aranyáni was exactly like a sword driven through the very middle of his heart. And leaving it behind him, as it were, to-

Bubbles of the Foam

gether with his reason that abandoned him, he went away hanging down his head, alone.

But unable to endure separation, yet unwilling to disobey Bimba, he used to come stealthily and lie lurking in the bushes, watching, to catch sight of Aranyáni. And sometimes, seizing his opportunity, when he knew that her father was away, he would creep out, trembling like a coward, and speak to her. And Aranyáni, displeased at him for coming to see her without her father's knowledge or permission, and not reciprocating his passion in the least, yet partly out of pity, and partly out of kindness arising from recollection of his playing with her in the past, and it may be, partly just a very little pleased with his honest admiration, and willing to waste a little of her time in teasing him, for want of a better lover, would sometimes talk to him a little, and laugh at him and tell him stories, and send him away more utterly infatuated, and more happy, and more miserable than ever, after making him promise never to come again. And every time he promised, and went away only to return again immediately, simply because he could not help it: dreading her reproof every time he dared to come, yet ready for all that to risk his life a hundred times over, only to bask once more in the nectar of the sunshine of that reproof. For the words of the straw, promising not to answer to the call of the amber that attracts it, are void of meaning, and perish in the very moment of their utterance, like pictures drawn on the surface of a running stream.

A Dappled Dawn

CHAPTER II

SO, then, there came a day, when Bimba went away to hunt in the forest, leaving Aranyáni alone at home. And on that morning, she was sitting by herself in her customary seat, on the trunk of a fallen tree, gazing, with her chin resting on her hand, away over the desert, that lay before her like an incarnation of the colour of vague youth-longing, ending in a blue dream. And wholly intent on her own thoughts, she remained sitting absolutely still, totally unconscious of all around her, as if her soul, in imitation of what it gazed at, had become the exact mirror of the silent desert's inarticulate and incommunicable dream. And yet, from time to time, a smile stole into her lips of its own accord, as if betraying against her will some sweet and secret hoard of delicious joy within, that she strove in vain to hide. And every now and then her eyes grew a little brighter, and there came a flush over her face, and a little tremor ran as it were all over her, like the ripple that comes and goes upon the bosom of a lake, stirred by a play of wind.

So as she sat, it happened, that Babhru came slowly through the wood, looking for her, and knowing her customary haunts. And suddenly catching sight of her sitting, he hesitated for a moment, and then came quietly and stood behind her, a little way off: half-pleased that she did not see him, and a little bit afraid of the moment when she should. And there he remained silent, yet

Bubbles of the Foam

with a heart beating so violently that it shook him till he trembled, gazing with ecstasy and adoration at the outline of her throat and her chin, and the corner of her lips, which he could only just see, round the curve of her cheek. And after a little while, longing to see more of those lips, he leaned eagerly forward, and put out one foot without looking where it fell; and stepping on a dry twig, it broke with a snap.

And at the sound, instantly she started up, and looked round, as if in terror. And strange! when she saw him, there came into her face surprise and displeasure, that were mingled with relief, and even disappointment, as if she had expected, and hoped, and yet even feared, to see someone else. And while she gazed silently at him in confusion, Babhru said sadly: Aranyáni, of what or of whom didst thou think, so intently, as to be unaware of my approach? For thy lips seemed to me to be smiling, as if with anticipation, and very sure I am that it was not at the thought of me or my coming that they smiled.

And Aranyáni blushed, and instantly frowned, at her own involuntary blush. And she said, as if haughtily: O Babhru, what are my thoughts to thee? And are they thy servants? And what right hast thou to be jealous of my thoughts, who hast not even the title or permission to be here at all? Didst thou not promise not to come again? and yet here thou art for all that, watching to surprise my very thoughts, while all the while I do not think of thee at all. Yet even so, here there is certainly no

A Dappled Dawn

rival to thyself. And Babhru said bitterly: Rivals could not make the matter worse, since by thy own confession thou dost not think of me at all. Even without rivals, I am utterly rejected and despised, by thee and by thy father. Then she said kindly: Nay, Babhru, not by me. Thou art for me, just what thou always wert, before. And Babhru said: Alas! that is my very grief. For I would have thee not the same, but something more. Then said Aranyáni: What more, O Babhru? And he looked at her sadly, and said: Dear Aranyáni, couldst thou not love me just a very little? And she laughed, and said: Poor Bruin, do I then not love thee very well? And Babhru said with emphasis: Love! Thou dost not so much as understand the meaning of the word.

And she looked at him for a moment, with eyes whose expression he could not comprehend, and she drew a deep breath, and turned away. And she said lightly: Do I not? then thou shalt tell me all about it: for I will allow thee to stay with me, for a very little while, just to show thee, that I love thee a very little. Sit down, then, beside me, and look not so melancholy, or I shall begin to think, to love is to be wretched: whereas I had imagined, in my innocence, the very contrary. And Babhru said: Thou art utterly deceived: for love is misery. And she laughed, and exclaimed: Why, then, I am better as I am, without it. What! wouldst thou have me miserable? And he said: Well can I tell thee from experience, that every lover must be miserable, when, like myself, he cannot gain his

Bubbles of the Foam

object. And now I could almost wish evil to thy father, since he it is who stands, like a cloud, between me and the moon of my desire. And she said: What is this much-desired moon? And he said: Thou knowest very well, it is thyself: and I long to have thee for my wife, and live with thee alone, for ever and ever, in the wood.

Then said Aranyáni: O Bruin, it may be, the attainment of thy desire might sorely disappoint thy expectation, after all: since many times, those who have risen to the very summit of the mountain of their hopes have found themselves miserably deceived, and fallen suddenly to the very bottom of despair with a crash, like Chandana. And Babhru said: Who was Chandana? And he said within himself: Let her tell me about Chandana or anybody else, so only that I can cheat her into allowing me to sit here, and watch her lips moving, and look into her eyes.

And Aranyáni said: Babhru, thou art so simple, and thy soul is like crystal, so that I can see into thy secret thoughts without needing to be enlightened by thy voice. Didst thou not say to thyself: I care absolutely nothing for Chandana, so only that I may listen while she talks? And Babhru hung his head, with a blush. And Aranyáni clapped her hands in triumph, and exclaimed: See! O Bruin, thou art guilty. Yet despair not, for thou shalt hear all about Chandana, just the same. Know, that long ago, there was a King, who had innumerable wives, and fifty sons, of whom this very Chandana was one. Now all these sons lived in anxiety, say-

A Dappled Dawn

ing to themselves: Which of us all will be the heir to the throne, and succeed our father when he dies? So they remained, rivals, and each had his eyes fixed upon the others, fearing to be supplanted. So Chandana's case was worse than thine, O Bruin, since thou art without a rival. And then, after a while, that old King, out of all his fifty sons, chose this very Chandana for his heir; and appointed him 'yuwarájá,'¹ with all the proper ceremonies. So when they were completed, that overjoyed yuwarájá ran, fresh from the installation, to the 'awarodha,'² to tell his mother of his triumph, and increase it by her praises. But he found her, to his amazement, all in tears, and as dismal as if he had come only to tell her of his death. So he said: Mother, what is the reason of such misery, on such a day of exultation? Should the gloom continue, while the sun is rising? But his mother looked sourly at him, and she said: Fool! thy rising sun is setting: thou art out, in thy quarters, and mistakest west for east: and soon enough, it will be night for thee. And Chandana said: I do not understand thee. Then said his mother: The King thy father discovered, long ago, the elixir of life: and even now he has been living for fifteen hundred years. And this is a jest that he plays, now and then, for his own amusement, making one of his innumerable sons his heir. For all his heirs die before him, as thou wilt also, never even reaching so much as

¹ i.e. 'little king,' Prince of Wales or Dauphin. The story is a piece of old folklore, and one version may be found in Soma-dewa. ² The women's apartments, or 'gynæceum.'

Bubbles of the Foam

the very first step of that throne that lures them on and hangs always just before them, like a bundle of 'hariali' grass held by a crafty rider on a stick before the nose of the deluded beast of burden that carries him along. Thine is only the phantom of a sun that will presently go down and disappear, leaving the true sun, thy father, still in the very blaze of noon.

So as he listened, the face of that unhappy Chandana fell. And he went away, and sank, just as his mother told him, into the night of melancholy; and abandoning his royal condition, he became a pilgrim, and died after many years at a very holy bathing-place, at last. But his father went on reigning, making his sons, one after another, 'yuwarájá,' exactly as before.

CHAPTER III

SO, then, when Aranyánt ended, Babhru said with a smile: Aranyánt, thy story is foolish, and altogether wide of the mark, and it brings me consolation rather than reproof. For very certainly thy father is not a King, and has not an elixir, and will not live for ever. And when he dies, thou wilt no longer be able to escape me, for we shall be alone together in the wood.

Then said Aranyánt: Babhru, thy confidence is very positive; and yet, who knows? Who knows what may happen in the future? Count not, O Bruin, with such ignorant presumption on finding me for ever at thy mercy in the wood: even after the disaster, which ought not to have occurred to

A Dappled Dawn

thee, even in a dream. And even if my father be, as thou sayest, not a King, I say, who knows? And all at once, she turned half round, facing him directly as he sat beside her, with malice and provocation in her eyes. And she said: Babhru, how if a King's son were suddenly to come into the wood, and carry me away, as many stories tell of others? Did not Dushmanta discover Shakuntalá, in exactly such a wood? But thou wilt say, she was more beautiful than I. And Babhru said gloomily: I will say nothing of the kind: for thou art far more beautiful than Shakuntalá or anybody else. Then said Aranyáni: Thou seest. So nothing is wanted to make my case tally with her own, save only the King's son. And is not the world full to the very brim, of Kings and their sons? And Babhru exclaimed with a groan: Alas! Aranyáni, thou art wounding my very heart, and this is the very thing of which I am afraid. For thy only preservation is, that this is a wood, into which nobody ever comes. And all day long I tremble, lest in very truth some stranger should come into the wood and see thee, and spread abroad the news of thy existence, like the wind which carries everywhere the scent of a lotus, till at length the bees come to plunder it of the honey it contains. Then, indeed, all would be over, for thee as for me.

And Aranyáni said, with mischief: O Bruin, what then? Wilt thou deny his flower to the bee, and is not the true and proper place of every flower either the wilderness, its origin, or the head of a King, its destiny and end?

Bubbles of the Foam

And once again, Babhru uttered a groan, and he exclaimed: Aranyánti, thy words are torture, and nothing whatever but the echo of my own fears. But this much I will tell thee, on my own part: that the King who shall come to carry thee away will do well to beware. For if I know it, and find him in the wood, he will never leave it, either with thee or without. And he looked away, with ferocity in his eyes and in his teeth, not perceiving that Aranyánti turned paler as he spoke. And presently she said, in a low voice: Surely this love must be an evil thing, if these are its results. And now for the very first time, I see, that thou art well named, O Bruin, and in very truth, a bear. What! wouldst thou actually slay the poor King's son who had never done thee any harm, simply for seeking me? And Babhru said sternly: What harm could he do me greater than robbing me of thee? But let him only come, and see!

And Aranyánti said slowly: O thou rude, and fierce, and love-bewildered Babhru, dost thou not know, that only he is virtuous, who is so far from revenging an injury that he returns it, on the contrary, by a benefit, as Bhrigu did: whose story would be a lesson to thee, of which thou standest in sore need. And Babhru said: I care not a straw, either for Bhrigu or anybody else: and if, in this matter, he could be of any other opinion than my own, I tell thee beforehand, that thy Bhrigu is a fool.

And Aranyánti laid her hand upon his arm, and said very gently: On the contrary, he was a sage:

A Dappled Dawn

sit still, and listen, while I tell thee all about him. Long ago there arose among the sages a dispute, as to which was the greatest of the gods. And some said, the Grandfather, and others, the Moony-crested, and others, the husband of Shri.¹ And finding that they could not agree, for all their disputing, they came to the conclusion, to settle the matter by experiment. And they chose from among them Bhrigu, and sent him away, to put the gods to the test. So Bhrigu went accordingly, and after a while, he fell in with Brahma. And drawing near that four-faced god, he neither saluted him, nor performed a 'pradakshina,'² but went up without ceremony and accosted him, with rude familiarity. Thereupon Brahma, in great wrath at his insolence, and on the very point of cursing that deliberately ill-mannered sage, was nevertheless appeased by him, by means of excuses and apologies. And so, leaving him appeased, Bhrigu proceeded further on, and coming to Kailás, enquired for Maheshwara. But the Moony-crested god, informed of his arrival, sent him out a message, bidding him go away again, and saying: I have no leisure, since I am at this very moment busy playing with my other half, the Daughter of the Snow. And going away accordingly, Bhrigu came upon the Lord Wishnu, lying fast asleep. And instantly he awoke him, by giving him a kick upon the breast, so hard, that he injured his own foot. Then

¹ i.e. Brahma, Shiwa, and Wishnu respectively.

² By moving round him, keeping him on the right: an established form of adoration.

Bubbles of the Foam

that husband of Shrí, rising up politely, said to him with concern and compassion in his voice: O Bhrigu, surely thou hast hurt thy own foot: for the kick was very severe. And as a rule, a blow hurts the giver more than the receiver. And sitting down beside him, that compassionate deity took the foot upon his lap, and began very gently to shampoo it, continuing till all the pain was gone. Then said Bhrigu: What god is greater than this god? For who but a god, and the very highest, would requite an unprovoked assault by tenderness, and pity, and oblivion of his own wrong? Surely this is the badge of Deity in its very essence, that, like sky-crystal, is pure, and absolutely transparent, and utterly without a flaw?'

CHAPTER IV

AND Babhru listened in silence, and when she ended, he said slowly: Aranyáni, dost thou then imagine, that the deity, so tolerant of injury to himself, would have been equally long-suffering and indifferent, had Bhrigu or any other, fool or sage, attempted to rob him of Shrí, and deprive him of his wife?

And Aranyáni laughed and said: But I am not thy wife, O Babhru, yet. Thou art anticipating. And Babhru said: Alas! no. But at least, if thou art not yet my wife, thou art not any other man's: nor, if I can prevent it, shalt ever be. And she said: Babhru, thou art utterly intolerable, and a

' This curious and very beautiful legend may be found in the Puránas.

A Dappled Dawn

tyrant: and at this rate, I shall without a doubt die unmarried, if all the sons of Kings who may come to seek me in the wood are to be slain by thee. And much I fear, that the wood will come to rival even Kurukshetra,¹ with all its heroes lying dead in heaps, except thyself.

And Babhru said without a smile: Aranyáni, thou art laughing at a thing which, for all that, is very solemn, and very simple: for very sure it is, that whoever would deprive me of thyself must either slay me first, or die himself. And she said: Poor Bruin, this alone is very sure, that love must be a very demon, since he has filled thee with such a raging thirst for the slaughter of the sons of Kings. But come now, I will tell thee a better way: and that is, to kill me: for so wilt thou effectually circumvent and cheat all these lovesick and imaginary Kings, at a single blow: if, as it seems, I am to be a cause of strife and bloodshed, as long as I am alive.

And he looked at her fixedly, and said: Jest not with my devotion, for it may be, thou art nearer the truth than thou imaginest. Will any King whatever love thee half as well as I do? Yet thou wilt not love me, and as I think, it is because I am not on the level of thy thoughts, and not a King.²

¹ The scene of the great battle in the 'Mahábhárata,' where all the heroes killed each other.

² It should be remembered by the English reader that 'sons of Kings' are more numerous, in India, than in the West. All Rajpoots are sons of Kings: and Aranyáni herself a Rajpootni. To marry a King's son would be for her, not merely a desire, but a duty: an affair of caste. All this flavour evaporates in a translation.

Bubbles of the Foam

Then she laughed, and exclaimed: Alas! poor Bruin, thou art mad: for all these Kings are only dreams, yet art thou as savage as if they were actually before thee in a row. And he said: Aye! only dreams: and yet the dreams are earnest, and are thine. Kings are the very matter of thy dreams. Is not this the subject of thy reveries as thou gazest at the sand? Ha! am I right? Dost thou never long for some King's son to come and fill thy life with joy, and deliver thee from the monotony of this wood, and thy father, and myself? Am I not below thee, in thy estimation? Then for what canst thou long, but for thy peer?

And he looked keenly at Aranyáni, and as her eyes met his, she wavered, a very little, and looked away, and said: Alas! poor Babhru, thy love is jealousy, which makes thee so sharp-sighted, that thou seest things that are not there. So trouble not thy foolish head about anything so slight and insignificant as the subject of my dreams, otherwise thou wilt place thyself on the level of the zanies of Chincholi. And he said: Thou speakest the very truth: I am the very type of a fool, striving to reach what is above him and beyond his reach, even when he stands on tiptoe: and that is, the level of thy thoughts. And Aranyáni said: See now, I said well, thou art the very fellow of the sages of Chincholi: a city, into which on a day there came a certain sanctimonious ascetic, called Pinga, from the colour of his hair. And arriving at the square before the palace of the King, he sat down in its middle, and spreading out his left hand open be-

A Dappled Dawn

fore him, he looked intently at its palm. And so he continued, wrapt in the contemplation of his hand, paying absolutely no regard to anything around him, till night. And this he did every day, all day long, till at length he became the very target of the curiosity of the people of the town, who crowded round him in a throng, disputing as to the meaning of his singular behaviour, and all maintaining opposite opinions. And one said: This ascetic is undoubtedly pondering on the Panchatantra.¹ And another: Beyond a doubt, the holy man is meditating on Death. And yet another: Is not this an ascetic? And of what should he meditate but the five fires? But a pundit passing by, said: His meditation can be of nothing but the syllogism and its members. Thereupon another said: Is it not the left hand?² Then his thoughts are of the Shakti. And a wag among them said: Aye! For of what do all these holy men perpetually think, but of the five arrows of the God of Love? And a Brahman said: Thou art altogether out in thy conjecture, for he meditates on nothing but the sheaths of the soul. And a Gáwali shouted: The sage is considering devoutly the parts of the cow. For what is holier than a cow? And there arose such an uproar in the city that the citizens all came to blows, dividing into factions, around him, while all the time he sat peacefully just as if nobody was there, gazing at his hand. And finally the King

¹ The point of these interpretations depends on the number five, which enters into all of them. ² There is a play here on 'wámá,' which means the 'left hand' and 'a beautiful woman.'

Bubbles of the Foam

sent officers to say to him: Depart quickly from the city, for thy presence is a cause of sedition. Thereupon Pinga said: Interrupt my meditation, and I will curse the city, so as to deprive it of both sun and rain. So fearing his curse, the King had recourse to diplomacy. And he sent his 'purohita' at night, who secretly induced that obstinate ascetic to go away, of his own accord, by giving him a 'lakh.' And as he slowly went out of the city, his 'chela' said to him aside: Master, what was the subject of thy meditation: for I am curious to know? Then that crafty ascetic suddenly laughed like a hyæna. And he said: I meditated about absolutely nothing but my own hand. And now, this is a lesson to thee. For such is the nature of fools, who comprehend least of all what is absolutely simple, and see last of all what is lying before their nose. And whoever knows this possesses treasure inexhaustible, and is master of the world.

CHAPTER V

AND Babhru watched her intently, as she spoke, and when she ended, he said suddenly and abruptly: Aranyáni, thou art deceiving me. And she said: How, O Babhru? And he said: Thou art this morning totally unlike thyself: for thy customary melancholy is absent, and thou art strange, and elated, and agitated, and as it seems to me, thou art telling me idle stories, like one that listens all the while to something else, as it were in a hurry merely to throw me off the

A Dappled Dawn

scent, and hide from me a secret, and amuse me like a child. And somehow or other, I feel as if there were a wall between us, this morning, which was never there before. Aye! I am sure, I know not how, thou art playing as it were a part, to cast a mist before my eyes, and hide from me some agitation in thy soul.

And Aranyáni laughed, and blushed, and frowned, and finally she said: Babhru, thy love is a disease, which fills thy head with nightmare, and thy eyes with phantoms born of suspicion in thy soul. And he said: Alas! thy own behaviour gives the lie to thee. Thou art not like thyself, and I am right. And now, then, I will tell thee, in return for thy stories, one myself; but unlike them, mine shall be very sad, and very true.

And Aranyáni turned, and looked at him with anxiety in her eyes: and she said: O Babhru, a story, and from thee! what is it? And he said: Dost thou remember, a little while ago, when we wandered, the last time I saw thee, in the wood? And she said: Yes. Then he said: Dost thou recollect, how all at once I stopped thee, and turned back with thee, and left thee so abruptly? And shall I tell thee, why? And Aranyáni gazed at him, turning a little paler, without speaking. Then he said: Know, that as we went, I looked, and suddenly I saw before me in the bushes, what was unseen by thee, the face of a man. And as I saw it, I shuddered, for his eyes were fixed on thee, with astonishment, and evil admiration. And instantly I turned, and took thee home, and left

Bubbles of the Foam

thee, and hurried back to find him: but he was gone. I hunted everywhere, but he was gone. And ever since, I cannot even sleep, for thinking of this man, and of his eyes, which haunt me, as they gloated on thee, like a terror, bidding me beware, and saying as it were: Ha! Ha! thy treasure is discovered. And I resemble one, whose buried hoard of gold has been seen by other eyes; and hardly do I dare to be away from thee, not as before, merely for love of thee, but for fear, lest, on returning, I should find my treasure gone.

And all at once, he burst into a sob; and he rose, and took a step or two away from her. And Aranyáni rose also, and she said with agitation: O Babhru, what was he like, this man? Was he tall and powerful, like thee? And Babhru said: Nay, he was a little ugly man, with weasel eyes. And Aranyáni laughed, as if with relief. And she exclaimed: O Babhru, what is this? Is this a man of whom to be afraid? What! shall I fall a victim to this little man with weasel eyes, who hides in bushes? Be under no concern, for so much I will tell thee, that not even a hundred such pigmies shall ever carry me away.

And Babhru said sadly: Alas! Aranyáni, thou dost not understand: and like the flower in thy hair, thou art utterly ignorant of thy own attraction. And exactly such a man as this, whom thou despisest, is the most dangerous of all. Dost thou think, if once through his agency the world should suddenly become aware of what this wood con-

A Dappled Dawn

tains, it would long remain unvisited by others? It was not the face of the intruder that I feared, but his tongue, which, could I but have caught him, I would have cut out of his throat, to keep it from betraying thy existence to the world outside.

And as he looked towards her, with tears in his eyes, all at once Aranyáni changed colour, turning suddenly paler, as if her heart, appalled by the apparition of some menace in his words, had summoned to its assistance all the blood in her face. And after a while she said: Babhru, thou art ill, and thy unfortunate affection not only makes thee over-estimate my value, but even leads thee to alarm thyself and me, by creating imaginary fears. And moreover, come what may, the mischief, if any mischief is, is done, and the tongue that is thy bugbear is safe and at a distance in its owner's head, talking, very probably, of anything but me. But now, while we ourselves are talking, time has fled, and it is nearly noon; for the shadows are at shortest; and now, I dare not let thee stay here any longer; as indeed, I was to blame, in allowing thee to stay at all; and better had it been for both of us, it may be, hadst thou never come. And should my father suddenly return, and find thee, it would be worse. Why need I tell thee what thou knowest very well? And what good can come to thee, by longing for what is forbidden? Thou dost only add fuel to the flame of thy fever, which I, did I do my duty, ought rather to quench, by pouring over it the cold water of distance and separation. But my compassion for thee fights with my obedience to

Bubbles of the Foam

my father, for I am only a woman after all, and very weak; and it may be, I love thee just a very little. So be content with all that I can give thee, and do not come again, but recover from thy fears, and forget me. I cannot be thy wife, but I wish thee well. And now goodbye, and go away.

So as she stood, dismissing him, Babhru turned without a word, and went away into the wood, very slowly, while she watched him go. And she put both her hands behind her head, and stood looking after him, absolutely still. And as fate would have it, he turned round, just before he passed out of sight, and looked back, and saw her standing, gazing after him with a smile, with every outline of her round and slender woman's form standing out sharp as the moon's rim, as if on purpose to intoxicate his eye, against the background of the distant sand, like a threefold incarnation of his inaccessible desire, and his disappearing happiness, and his irrevocable farewell, in a feminine shape. And all at once he came back to her with hurried steps. And he reached her, and fell down before her, and seized a corner of her red garment that was loose, and kissed it. And then he started up. And he said, in a voice that shook, with tears stealing from his eyes: Well I understand that I am looking at thee, for the very last time.

And then he turned, and went away very quickly, without looking round: while she stood in agitation, looking after him, till he disappeared among the trees.

THE THIRST OF AN ANTELOPE: II. A GLAMOUR OF NOON

A GLAMOUR OF NOON

CHAPTER I

SO she stood, a long while, gazing in the direction of his departure, touched by his emotion into an emotion, that was more than half compassion, of her own, and sorry, yet fearing above all things to see him return. And then at last, as if satisfied that he was actually gone, she turned away. And she murmured to herself: Alas! poor Babhru, hadst thou but known how near thy fear came to the very truth, I doubt whether I could ever have got thee to go away at all. And even as it is, it is a wonder that he has not actually discovered what his jealousy prompted him to guess: and all the while I trembled, feeling a very culprit, so accurately did he probe my soul, and see into my heart. And wonderful exceedingly is the sagacity of love, that discerns, from the very faintest indications, what would escape all other eyes! And yet, for all his acuteness, how little did he dream, that I knew, by experience, what love is, better, far better, than himself. He knew that I deceived him, but did not know, how far. And after all, what shadow of a right has he, to claim my affection for himself? But now he has had his turn, and all that I could give him: and now, then, it is my turn, and it is time, and it is noon.

Bubbles of the Foam

And then, all at once, Babhru, and everything concerning him, vanished clean out of her mind. And strange! she changed, as if by magic, in an instant, into another woman. For as she stood, unconsciously she smiled, and the smile ran, as it were, over her whole body with a sudden wave of delicious agitation, and from a woman that she was, lording it, as if with a sense of superiority, she turned into a child, trembling all over with the excitement of anticipation. And she looked very carefully all round her, as if to make sure of being unobserved; and all at once, she ran very quickly away into the wood, turning her back on Babhru, down the hill towards the sand. And coming at length to a little clump of trees, she stopped abruptly, and clapped her hands. And at that very instant, as if he had been waiting for the signal, Atirupa issued from the trees. And Aranyáni ran towards him, breathless, half with running, and half with the agitation of the joy of reunion, and threw herself into his arms, with a cry.

And then, for a while, that pair of lovers did nothing but kiss each other all over, with kisses that followed one another like raindrops in a storm. And after a while, he said: Dear Aranyáni, thou art very late, and like the little rogue thou art, hast kept me waiting, as I think, on purpose, to make thy value greater, and increase my thirst, till I had almost determined, in despair, to go away. And Aranyáni said, playfully: What! couldst thou not wait for me a little while, and am I not worth wait-

A Glamour of Noon

ing for, at all? And he kissed her very carefully on both eyes, and he said: Indeed thou art. Then she said softly: And dost thou then imagine that delay is any easier to me than to thyself? Know, that I had difficulty, in coming even when I did. For I had first to get rid of someone else, in order to come at all. And Atirupa said: Thy old lover, of whom thou hast told me? Then she said: Thou sayest well, my old lover, who loves me, as I think, far better than thou dost, and almost as much as I love thee. But alas! for him, since I love him not again; and well will it be, for me, if in thy case also, love is not wholly on one side. Say, dost thou love me, even half as much as I love thee? And Atirupa said, with a smile: Nay, if I must believe thee, it is impossible.

And she gazed at him with insatiable eyes, and she said with a sigh: Yes, it is impossible. And yet, strange! it is not yet a week, since I came upon thee in the wood for the very first time, thinking, as I saw thee, that the very god of love had, somehow or other, dropped out of heaven, and wandering about on earth, had lost his way in our wood, only for my destruction; to consume me, like lightning irresistible, only by a look: and turn me suddenly from free into a slave, the property of another, who is master of her body and her soul. And yet, only this very morning did I learn, how nearly I had lost thee: since thy servant that saw me in the wood, and was the cause of thy coming, came within an ace of perishing himself, before he ever got away to tell. And

Bubbles of the Foam

Atirupa said: How? And Aranyáni told him. And then she said: And now I fear for thee also: for should Babhru chance to see thee, his reason will desert him. And I tremble to think of thy encounter, with such a giant as is he. And yet I know not what to do. For he will surely come across thee, sooner or later, as indeed it is marvellous that he has not done already: since thou comest daily to me in the wood.

And Atirupa laughed, and he said: Fear nothing, O thou with the eyes of a gazelle: for it may be he himself, that would suffer most by our meeting. Then said Aranyáni: It is exactly this I fear. For I would not have thee harm him, even though my fear is all for thee. And Atirupa said: There is a very easy way to solve this difficulty, and deprive thee of all cause of fear, which has not yet occurred to thee. And Aranyáni said: What is that? And Atirupa said: It is only in this wood that we could ever meet each other. But what if thou shouldst come away with me, O thou delicious little slave, leaving the wood behind thee, to a place he cannot reach?

CHAPTER II

AND then, Aranyáni started, and looked at him with eyes that were filled with timidity and dismay, as if she hardly understood. And after a while, she said: What! come away with thee! it is impossible. And she gazed at him in terror, while Atirupa looked at her steadily, with caressing impenetrable eyes. And

A Glamour of Noon

he murmured to himself: Now, then, I have startled my beautiful and timid fawn, but the seed is for all that sown in her beating heart. And now, then, we shall see, whether I can get her, by persuasion and caresses and cajolery, to come away of her own accord; or whether, as I do not wish, I shall have to carry her off by force. For she will be far sweeter if she yields herself, even though reluctant, than if I have to make her come away, whether she will or no. And presently he said gently: Dear Aranyáni, dost thou imagine that either I can live without thee, or remain for ever in thy wood? For even as it is, I have been living in the wood, on thy account, for many days, at a distance from my capital, neglecting all my state affairs; and long ago my ministers must have wondered, what can have become of me. So of two things, one is absolutely necessary: and either thou must come away, or we must part.

And Aranyáni looked at him steadily, turning very pale. And she murmured in bewilderment: Part! Thou and I! And Atirupa said: Dear, thou seest, the very notion makes thee pale. Then what will it be to part, in reality? Couldst thou endure to live without me? Or can I live for ever in the wood? Then what remains but this alone, to leave the wood thyself, and come with me, since there is absolutely no other way?

And Aranyáni drew herself away, out of his arms; and she stood, looking down upon the ground, silent, and very pale: while Atirupa watched her, standing still, with eyes that never

Bubbles of the Foam

left her for an instant. And after a while, he said again: Dear Aranyáni, couldst thou actually think, it could continue thus for ever, or that I could remain for ever, as I am doing now, camping in the wood, and coming every day to see thee?

And Aranyáni sighed, and she said very slowly, still looking at the ground: I know not, for I have thought of absolutely nothing, since I saw thee, but thyself; and that was enough for me, and more; since my soul was so full that it had room for nothing else. And all the past had vanished, and the future did not matter, swallowed up in the present which was ecstasy, and intoxication, and thou. How could I think of anything at all? And now thou hast suddenly awaked me from a dream, which in my folly I had imagined would never have an end, but last for ever. And lo! it is gone, and all is over, and finished, almost before it has begun.

And Atirupa said in a whisper: Say rather, O Aranyáni, that the dream is only just beginning.

And she answered angrily: Dost thou think it then so easy for a flower to consent to be torn up by the roots, and carried from its home no matter where? For like a flower I am rooted in this wood, where I have lived and grown since the beginning, with my father and the trees, and the creepers, and the deer. And now thou hast placed thyself, with a sudden flash of lightning, in opposition to it all; and thou wouldst make me choose, threatening to go away and leave me, unless I sacrifice it all, to go into the darkness, I know not where, with

A Glamour of Noon

thee. Dost thou think the choice is easy which will utterly destroy me, whichever way it falls? Thou art the cause of all, and resemblest a knife, that bids me to consent and rejoice, while it cuts my heart in two, possessing absolutely no heart whatever of its own.

And Atirupa said gently: Alas! Aranyáni, thou art utterly unjust, and this was my very fear, that when I offered thee to choose between the wood, which is thy past, and myself, who am thy future, I should seem to thee utterly of no account, and light in the balance, weighed against what I asked thee to resign. I say, thou blamest me unjustly, when I am absolutely blameless, unless indeed it be a fault, to love thee, for which not I, but thyself, or rather the Creator is to blame, for making thee exactly what thou art. Who can blame the butter for melting in the flame, or make it a crime in the ocean, for rising in tumult and agitation at the sight of the tender digit of the moon? Is it my fault, if I must go away, since after all my kingdom is in need of me, and even as it is, I have remained here too long, and all on thy account? And what can I do but ask thee to come with me, since unless we are to part, there is absolutely nothing else to do? And does not every maiden do the same? Did not Shakuntalá abandon her home and her relations in the forest, to follow King Dushmanta? And did not even the Daughter of the Snow abandon, not only her father, but even her own body, for the sake of the Moony-crested god? And art thou fearful, O thou intoxicating child, to go into the dark?

Bubbles of the Foam

But what will darkness matter? nay, will not the dark itself become nectar, provided I am there? Or rather, will not the darkness be still darker, and gloomier, and blacker, if I go away and leave thee by thyself?

CHAPTER III

AND Aranyáni stood for a moment, when he ended; and then all at once she sank down upon the ground, and hid her face in her two hands, and began to sob. And after a while she said in agitation: What hast thou done to me? For till I saw thee, I was happy; and now I am torn by thee utterly in two. For I cannot bear to part either with thee, or with my father and my home. And now I could wish never to have seen thee, and well had it been, if thy servant never had set eyes on me, to tell thee, and bring thee to the wood. Why hast thou come hither to destroy me? For all has come about exactly as Babhru said and feared, when he foretold that thy coming would be my utter ruin.

And Atirupa listened, and he murmured to himself: She has fallen into the snare, by avowing her vacillation, and allowing herself to debate, instead of repudiating my proposal: and now it will be my own fault, if I cannot turn the scale in my own favour, by playing on her agitated heart. And he said coldly: Ha! then, as I thought, it is Babhru who causes all the trouble; and he it is, whom thou art so unwilling to resign.

And instantly Aranyáni started up, and ex-

A Glamour of Noon

claimed with vehemence and indignation: What! dost thou taunt me, dost thou actually dare to taunt me, with Babhru, whom I have sacrificed without a thought to thee? Alas! poor Babhru. Little does he resemble thee, for so far from taking me away, he would live at my bidding even in a desert, and give up a hundred kingdoms, if he had them, for my sake. And Atirupa said: Then be it as thou wilt, for I will not be his rival. Go with him to thy desert, and I will go to mine.

And he turned, as if to go away in anger. But as he went, Aranyáni sprang towards him with a shriek. And she seized him by the arm, and shook it passionately, exclaiming: Away with Babhru! O forgive me, for I am mad, and I know not what I say or do. What is Babhru in comparison with thee? Only be not angry, and do not go, do not leave me, for thy going is my death. And she clutched him, and caught him by the neck, and drawing his face violently down to her, she began to kiss him without ceasing, mingling the rain of her kisses with the shower of her tears. And after a while, she drew back, and holding his neck very tightly with her left arm, she gazed intently at his face, as if in meditation, drawing her finger slowly all around it, and over each eyebrow, and round and round his mouth, over and over again. And then all at once she threw her right arm also round his neck, and hid her face upon his breast, exclaiming, while her own breast beat like a wave upon his heart: Either thou never shouldst have come, or shouldst never go away.

Bubbles of the Foam

And Atirupa stood quietly, supporting her in his arms, and allowing her to do with him exactly as she pleased. And finally, he stroked her hair gently with his hand, and murmured to himself: Now very soon, I think, she will consent, as it were without consenting, to come away, after a little coaxing. And he said aloud: Dear Aranyánt, it is not I that am tearing thee in two, as thou sayest: but it is rather thou thyself that art pulling thy soul to pieces, utterly without a cause. Truly wonderful is love, that fills his victims with fears that are absurd, and makes them see before them dangers that do not exist at all!

And all at once Aranyánt raised her head, and began to laugh, looking at him strangely, and saying to herself: These were my very words to Babhru, only an hour ago. And Atirupa said: Now, then, thou art laughing, equally without a cause: but why? And she said: It is nothing. Then he said: Is it thy reason returning to thee that makes thee laugh instead of weep? For why should it so frighten and disturb thee, to think of leaving all behind for me? Dost thou think I cannot give thee compensation, ten thousand times over, for all thou lettest go? Then of what art thou afraid?

And Aranyánt raised her head, and looked fixedly straight into his eyes, and yet strange! seeing nothing, for her soul was absent, thinking not of him at all, but of Babhru. And she said within herself: Can it be, that what Babhru is to me, that I am to another, and that of every pair of lovers, one only loves? And what then will be my fate, if I

A Glamour of Noon

follow him in spite of all, only to discover, that just as I left Babhru in the lurch, so I myself shall be abandoned, it may be, for some other woman's sake? And at the thought, she shuddered, and grew cold all over, and turned suddenly paler than a waning moon.

CHAPTER IV

AND Atirupa saw it, and was puzzled, understanding nothing of what was passing in her soul. And he drew her, half-resisting, once more towards him, and began again to caress her hair, saying as he did so, very slowly: Aran-yáni, thou art in very truth, for thy timidity and thy eyes, own sister to the deer: and yet, somehow, I would not have it otherwise, for thy timidity is not less beautiful than those great eyes which it fills with apprehension and distrust: and wert thou brave, thy soft body would not quiver, to fill me with emotion, nor should I now be tasting, as I kiss thee, the salt beauty of those pearls, thy tears. Stand still, then, a little while, O pretty little coward, and if thou wilt, tremble yet a little in my arms, and grow calm, and let me reassure thee: for thou takest fright at the noise of every rustling leaf, not stopping to consider, whether there be really anything to injure thee or no. And now let me ask thee: I have told thee who I am, and shown thee many things even of thyself, that were unknown to thee: for so far from being strangers, we are actually kin. And why then shouldst thou fear to come away? for to whom shouldst thou come, if

Bubbles of the Foam

not to thy own kindred? And yet, that is the very reason why I cannot ask thy father for thee. For dost thou think, should I go to him, and ask him, he would bestow thee on me, or let thee go away? Say, would he consent? And Aranyáni said, in a low voice: If, as thou hast told me, thou really art the son of Jaya, then rather would he see me lying dead at his feet. And Atirupa said: Thou seest. Yet why should thou and I be enemies, because our parents were? And what then, O Aranyáni, of the other? Would thy Babhru let thee go? And she said: Nay, rather would he slay thee, or himself, or it may be even me. Then said Atirupa: O foolish one, canst thou then not bring thyself to comprehend, that since I must absolutely go, and none will let thee go, either thou must come away with me, or stay here by thyself? And yet, when I show thee the necessity, thou art ready to consume me like a straw in the flame of thy reproaches. What then? Wouldst thou have me go away secretly, saying nothing? And wouldst thou not then exclaim against me as a traitor, never seeing me return? And dost thou think it easy for me to go away, leaving thee behind? I tell thee, I cannot go away without thee, and yet I cannot stay. Then only tell me, what to do. Say, little cousin, why wilt thou fear to come away with me? I marvel rather that thou dost not fear to stay. What wilt thou do alone, when I am gone? Will thy father console thee for my absence, thy father who leaves thee all alone? or will Babhru make up to thee for thy sending me away? I tell thee, they will both

A Glamour of Noon

become so hateful in thy sight, that thou wilt run away of thy own accord, merely to escape from them, no matter where. And then thou wilt bitterly regret thy scruples, all too late, having lost the opportunity that never will return; for if I go without thee, I shall never come again. But my image will haunt thee, and follow thee about like a shadow, to darken all thy life, and instead of a rapture ever present, I shall be to thee a memory of bitterness, and everlasting self-reproach, and vain remorse. And thou wilt grow gradually older, alone, being in thy own eyes a thing intolerable, as having cast away a priceless gem, delicious companionship, friendship and affection, that Fortune herself fished thee from the deep, only to see her present thrown, with ingratitude, by thee, away. And in thy loneliness thou wilt seek in vain to flee even from thyself, and it may be, judging thy life utterly unendurable, thou wilt seek refuge from its horror in a death of thy own contriving, having missed the very fruit of thy birth, and ending like a blunder of the Creator, and a thing that had better not have been.

CHAPTER V

AND as he spoke, he felt Aranyáni on his breast, sobbing till she shook him, as if to say, Cease, for thou art driving a knife in- to my heart. And yet he went on slowly, as if his very object were to stab her to the quick. And then, all at once he changed. And he whispered in her ear: Dear cousin, why dost thou so obstin-

Bubbles of the Foam

ately destroy thyself and me? What! dost thou make believe to love me, calling thyself slave, and yet refuse to follow me wherever I may go? Or dost thou think that thou art dreaming, mistaking a shadow for reality, expecting suddenly to wake, and find nothing in thy arms, and thy vision of happiness a phantom, vanishing like the picture in the desert, leaving nothing but the sand? Thou resemblest a very foolish little deer, that for idle fear of falling victim to delusion, should absolutely refuse to drink, even at a pool. O deer, what can ever convince thee of the reality of water, if thou wilt not believe, even when thou art actually standing, as at present, knee-deep in the lake? Must the very future become present, before thou wilt trust thyself to credit what it holds? But thou askest impossibility, and like every other maiden, thou canst not experience the future till it comes. Hast thou, then, no faith in me at all? Out, out, upon the love that cannot trust! O Aranyáni, surely thy love is very small, and a mere imitation and counterfeit of love: for as a rule, true love is tested by its power of putting faith in what it loves. See, then, thou unbeliever, I will try to bring the future before thy very eyes, and as I did before, when I told of the life that lay before thee by thyself, so now will I paint for thee another picture, to show thee an image of that life that thou wilt forfeit, by sending me away alone.

And he paused for a moment, as if reflecting on his coming words. But he murmured to himself: I feel that she is hesitating, and trembling in the

A Glamour of Noon

balance; resembling a fruit that fears to fall, yet knows that its very nature dooms it to be eaten, and is half inclined on that account to drop of its own accord. And now, with a little shaking, she will drop into my hand: since like a very woman, she cannot say either yes or no, wishing to be forced along the path which all the while she longs, yet is terribly afraid, to tread. And now then will I bait the hook with flattery, and we shall see whether this golden fish will not swallow it as greedily as all her silver sisters, resembling as they do delicate and fragile foolish ware that sells itself in a market created by its own vanity, where false coin passes easily without detection, and is even more potent and valuable than true. And yet in her case, flattery is very easy, for the grossest is only the simple truth.

And presently he said, in a very low voice: Aranyáni, tell me: am I beautiful? And she said, after a while, with her face hidden in his breast: Why ask me to repeat what I have told thee in every way a thousand times already? Then he said: And does it not occur to thee, that thou givest me what I give thee? And so we are a pair, for if my beauty is an idol to thee, what else is thine to me? But thou, all ignorant of thy own extraordinary charm, art incredulous, not understanding that I also am a devotee to the spell of thy dreamy eyes, and the aromatic fragrance of thy hair, and the clinging prison of thy soft round arms, and the taste of thy delicious lips, whose kisses cool, like snowflakes, by their leaf-like half involuntary fall,

Bubbles of the Foam

the burning caused by the touch of thy trembling breast, when it beats on my heart like the surge of the sea. And should we separate, that were made for one another like Maheshwara and the Daughter of the Snow? Nay, we will rather grow together, thou, like the creeper, clinging ever to me, just as thou art doing now, indistinguishable from the tree which is myself. And thou shrinkest from the darkness, but I will be thy darkness and thy night, O thou slender digit of the moon. What wouldst thou do without thy night, O moon? Or didst thou say, thyself, thou wert a flower? Well, thou shalt be my blue lotus, and I will be thy pool: looking into which, thou shalt see thy own reflection, and rejoice. Or, if thou wilt, I will play the river, and thou shalt be the silver swan that floats upon its breast. What! wilt thou take from the river all its beauty, by refusing to float upon the water that only longs to be adorned by so beautiful a burden? Or better still, thou shalt be my mango blossom, and I, thy mad black bee, living only to plunder my shy sweet blossom of its intoxicating wine; aye, without thee, I should indeed resemble a golden cup, without the wine that gives it all its use and worth. Thou art the salt, of me the ocean, and the pearl within my shell: and with thee, I shall be a very Wishnu, with thee, for my Fortune and my Shri. And like a word, I should be utterly meaningless without thee, who art my meaning and my soul. And wouldst thou separate, and sever me from thee? Nay, nay, O cousin, we will live together, not like accidental waifs that

A Glamour of Noon

haply meet to part again upon the waves of time, but rather like two happy children playing King and Queen, drifting in a golden boat along the crystal stream of life, never so much as touching on a shoal, but gliding on, sometimes plying silver oars, and sometimes spreading a purple sail to catch the sandal-scented breeze that blows from Malaya loaded with the lazy odour of the South, letting all the hours slip past us unperceived, till we float away together into the open sea of Death.

CHAPTER VI

AND as he murmured, holding Aranyáni in arms that added emphasis by the affection of their pressure to the persuasion of his voice, all at once she tore herself away from him abruptly, and went and stood, at a little distance, by herself, silent, and looking out upon the sand. And Atirupa stood still, watching her with curious, half passionate, half meditative eyes. And he said within himself: She is standing on the very edge of the precipice, into which she is just about to fall, irresolute, and dizzy, and distracted by an arbitration which she dares not settle either way, not so much out of desire to go, or stay, but rather because she is equally unable and unwilling, either to stay, or go: and in the agony of her beautiful perplexity, she is craving to be delivered from the choice, by having the matter settled for her: and now, the weight even of a hair would turn the scale. And he drew near slowly, and said, after a while: Hast thou forgotten, O cousin, that there

Bubbles of the Foam

will be no farewell to say to thy surroundings, though thou shouldst leave them now? For there is absolutely nothing to prevent thee from returning to visit them, as often as thou wilt. But still she answered nothing, remaining with her back turned towards him, exactly as before.

And once again he said: Aranyáni, dost thou hear me? I do not ask thee to say goodbye for ever to the wood.

And he waited for a while, and at last, as she never either moved or spoke, he said again: Since, then, thou art absolutely determined, and thy mind is made up to let me go away alone: it is well. So, now, there is nothing left, but for me to go. And I must absolutely depart, whether I will or no. For my kingdom requires me, and my retinue is waiting at the bottom of the hill, to bring me over the sand. And sometimes in the wood thou wilt remember me, and it may be, offer water to the ghost of our dead happiness, and the love that might have been, for in this wood I cannot live, and if thou wilt not come away, it is useless to return. So bid me but farewell, and I will go, and thou shalt never see me more.

And then she turned. And she put out her hand towards him, as if with entreaty, and made a single step, and all at once she swayed, and would have fallen, but that he caught her in his arms. And she said, in a voice so low as scarcely to be heard: Take me, if thou must, and quickly, for in another moment, I think that my heart will break in two.

A Glamour of Noon

And then, she sank down, bereft of her reason, and lay in his arms in a swoon.

And Atirupa stood for a moment, looking down upon her, as he held her in his arms. And he said to himself, as if half in irresolution: So, then, it is over, and I have conquered, and she has yielded, and is mine. And yet, somehow or other, I feel, in this instance, a touch of something that resembles pity, and there is as it were a sting, resembling that of a bee, mixed with my honey, which I never felt before. For after all, she is my own relation. And what will she do, when she finds out her mistake? And yet, after all, the mischief is done, and now it is too late. For as it seems, she will break her heart, in a little while, whether she goes away with me, or not.

And then, he lifted her in his arms, and went away quickly through the trees, down the hill.

THE THIRST OF AN ANTELOPE
III. THE DESERT AND THE NIGHT

THE DESERT AND THE NIGHT

CHAPTER I

SO, then, night followed day, and day succeeded night, in order. And the new moon waxed, and waned: and every day the sun rose up as usual, and travelled slowly on, till he sank at eve, over the sand, beyond the western hill. And then at last, there came a day, when just as he was sinking, it happened that Babhru sat alone, watching him as he went down, at that very same place in the wood where he had parted last from Aranyāntī, the day she disappeared. And strange! short as had been the interval of time, he was altered, and it seemed as though years had rolled over him, writing on him in an instant the wrinkles of old age. For he looked like an incarnation of dejection, worn and wan, with eyes that were red and hollow, as if sleep had fled away from them, ousted by her jealous rivals, sorrow and her sister care. And as he saw the sun just on the very point of going down, he murmured to himself: He is but showing me the way, and now very soon, I shall follow his example, abandoning like him a birth, in which my business is done. For what is the use of this miserable body, deserted and forsaken by its soul, and left lying empty, and utterly forgotten, and despised? not even knowing where

Bubbles of the Foam

to look, or where that soul is gone: this body, which long ago I would have quitted not only without regretting it, but even with delight, could but I know for certain that Aranyáni is actually dead, and unable to return: since but for the hope of that return, I should have ceased to live these many days. Alas! I cannot even tell, whether she is dead, or still alive. And yet it cannot be: she is not dead. And yet, she is nowhere to be found: for I have searched the wood a hundred times from end to end, till there is not a single one of all its leaves I have not turned upside down, and all in vain. For she has vanished like a dream, leaving not so much as even the shadow of a clue behind: and she resembles a drop of dew, dried by the sun at noon on the leaf of a red lotus, with nothing but the memory of those who saw it in the morning to show that it was ever there. She has gone, I know not how, I know not where; snatched away and stolen, and it may be even put to death, or something that is worse than any death, by those who have carried her away, I know not who. And O alas! that I ever left her. I only was to blame, that saw the evil coming, and shrank in terror from its shadow, like a bird that sees upon the ground beside it the shadow of the hawk. I left her, and now, beyond a doubt, hope is absolutely over, and I shall never see her more. And why then should I delay, or wait to see another sun? But what, if after all, she were not dead, but still alive, and should return? Then, what a fool I should have been, to die! And yet, if she is dead? Alas! if she is dead, my life is

The Desert and the Night

but an idle waste of time, and yet I dare not die, for fear, lest after all, she should return.

And all at once, he stopped short: for as he spoke, there fell upon his ear a noise. And he listened, and exclaimed: I hear the tramp of horses, approaching in the wood. And he started up, like his own heart, that began to beat violently, as if catching at a straw of hope, in the whirlpool of despair. And he said to himself: Why should horses be coming through the wood, at such an hour? And as he stood gazing, with a soul as it were on tiptoe, in the direction of the sound, a rider suddenly issued from the trees, and came towards him, followed by others like himself. And as they reached him, they stopped: and their leader dismounted from his horse, and came towards him, holding it by the rein.

And when Babhru saw his face, he started, and exclaimed within himself: Ha! why! that is the very face that I saw lurking in the bush. And then, all at once, he shouted aloud: Ha! then, it was thou; it is thou, as I thought, who art the robber, after all.

And Chamu laughed, and he said: O woodman, not so loud: for thou art hasty, and thou art uncivil, and thou art altogether wrong: though so far thou art right, that we are old friends. Yet still thou art unjust, for I am not the robber. It was not I that carried off thy beauty from the wood, but my master, King Atirupa. And thou art very rude, to call even him a robber. For he did not steal thy beauty, but only borrowed her, for a little while,

Bubbles of the Foam

all with her own consent. And now he has returned her by my hands: and here she is.

And he turned, and Babhru looked, and lo! they lifted Aranyáni from a horse, and set her on the ground. And as Babhru stood gazing at her, like one struck by a thunderbolt, Chamu said again: Thou owest me not abuse, but gratitude, O woodman: for see, I have brought her back to thee, all across the sand, where many in my place would have left her in the middle of the way, for it was a thankless task, and she was a cross-grained burden, that was very loath to come at all. So as thou seest, thou wert very wrong, to call even Atirupa robber: for here she is again. And the women are silly creatures, who only have themselves to blame, since they flock to him, like flies to honey, all of their own accord. But this young beauty grew so peevish, when she found she was only one of a thousand others, that the Mahárájá could not keep her any longer. And now she will make thee the very best of wives, woodman: since she has had some lessons, and a little practice in the art, and come back richer than she went away: none the worse, but all the better, for having tasted a King's kisses, and learned her trade in the best of schools. Thy eldest son will be a beauty, even if all the others are as ugly as thyself. And if his mother calls him Atirupa, just as a reminiscence, never mind: for when she has once stopped weeping, she will love thee just as well as him.

And as he spoke, Babhru stared at him with eyes that hardly saw him, and ears that hardly

The Desert and the Night

heard him, and a soul that hardly understood, filled as it was to the very brim with such a flood of pity, and horror, and amazement, and yet delight at her return, no matter how, that there was absolutely no room at all for even a single drop of wrath. And while he looked from her to Chamu, and from Chamu back again to her, Chamu got back upon his horse, and all those riders rode away.

CHAPTER II

BUT Babhru stood exactly where he was, like a picture painted on a wall, hardly heeding their departure, gazing at Aranyáni. And as he watched her, tears rose up suddenly and stood, as if to blind him, in his eyes, springing from the well of the very ecstasy of compassion within his heart. For she lay half crouching, half fallen on the ground, exactly as they had set her down, never moving, and resembling a body that is all but dead. And her face, that was turned towards him, looked absolutely strange to him, so marvelously had it altered since he saw it last. For, as it seemed, youth and joy had fled from it, leaving it to be as it were a very battle-ground for grief and age, and passion and shame, and humiliation, and weariness, and despair. And instead of her forest garments, she was magnificently dressed, and yet her clothing was ill-arranged, and disordered, and very dusty; and her hair was all dishevelled, and floated loose about her head, as if to match and imitate the wild disorder of her soul

Bubbles of the Foam

within. And yet, somehow or other, she seemed for all that in his eyes even more beautiful than ever, with a beauty that appalled him as he saw it, for she was utterly unlike herself, as if her own soul had been suddenly changed into another, making its envelope into something other than it was, to suit the alteration. And gradually as Babhru watched her, his hair stood up upon his body, as if with fright, and anticipation of something coming, that he did not understand.

So he stood silent, watching her, forgetful of himself, with a soul that yearned to comfort her and soothe her, and caress her and console her, yet utterly unable, and half fearing, to say anything at all. And in the silence, gradually dread began to creep all over him, as he saw her continue, lying absolutely still, and yet every now and then breathing, very slowly and with difficulty, like one that is suffering an agony of pain. And at last, after a long while, he moved a little nearer, and he said, with timidity and emotion: O Aran-yáni, alas! thou art suffering. And dost thou think I can endure to see thee suffer? At least, at least, thou hast returned, no matter how. O alas! for all thy suffering, I only am to blame; for well I understood, I was wrong to abandon thee, and leave thee as a prey. But at least, thou hast returned, and only just in time: for hadst thou stayed away another day, I could not have endured. I thought thee dead, for day by day, I waited, and day by day, thou didst not come: and each night was longer, and more awful than the last. And I

The Desert and the Night

sought thee in every quarter of the wood, but thou wert not to be found. And now, lo! there before my eyes, hardly to be believed, thou art; and now I am almost ready once more to die, for joy, that is mingled, I know not how, with an agony of grief. And yet, I blame myself, selfish that I am, for being even able to rejoice at all, while thou art suffering. Ah! only tell me what to do, to share thy grief, or take it all upon myself.

And as he spoke, he leaned towards her, and looked, and lo! a tear rolled suddenly from her eye, and fell upon the ground: but she never stirred or spoke. And again he said, with difficulty and hesitation: Aranyánt, dost thou think, dost thou really think, thou art guilty in my eyes, or in any way to blame, because ruffians, attracted by thy beauty, came and carried thee away? Is it any fault in the lotus, if the traveller that sees it, plucks it, and wears it for a moment in his hair, only to throw it presently away, and trample it underfoot? Alas, it is not thou, but myself that I condemn, I only, that am guilty, and all the more, that whereas now I ought to weep with thee, I am, on the contrary, so transported with delight to see thee, returned to me no matter how, that I am almost ready to abandon the body out of joy. Or art thou fearful, lest I should torture thee with curiosity, or question, or reproach of any kind? Ah! no, listen now, and I will tell thee. Thou shalt think, if thou wilt, of all that has occurred to thee as nothing but a dream, from which thou hast awoken. Only a dream, from which thou hast

Bubbles of the Foam

awoken. And I, that never knew it, will forget it, as utterly and completely as thyself: and it is already buried in oblivion, and resembles a thing that has never come about, and had better not have been.

And again he leaned towards her, as if he were a culprit that begged her to forgive him, and lo! he saw the tears rolling from her eyes in a stream, as if something in his words were like a knife in her heart. But still she never spoke, and never stirred. And once again he said, as if with entreaty: Aran-yání, thou canst not imagine, even in a dream, what happiness is mine. See! thou art agitated, and it must be, very weary. And now, then, I will lead thee, or if thou wilt, carry thee, home. And there thou shalt sleep, absolutely undisturbed, for to-night, and to-morrow, and as long as thou shalt choose. And all the while, I will watch without, and bring thee food, and do everything as thou wilt, at thy bidding; and above all, guard, and protect thee, from any fresh attempt. Woe to the man who shall attempt to molest thee any more! And so shalt thou live, exactly as thou wilt, with me for thy servant. And very soon, even the memory of that which now distresses thee will fade out of thy soul. And there will be absolutely nobody to make thee feel ashamed, or in any way whatever bring trouble to the quiet of thy soul. For as to thy father, when he discovered thy disappearance, he came to me, thinking I had stolen thee. And when he saw instantly, by my frenzy, he was wrong, all at once he cried out: Mother and daughter, mother

The Desert and the Night

and daughter: this is a stab in the dark from Jaya. And I know not what he meant. But I think that his heart broke within him, for after a day or two, he died.

CHAPTER III

AND then, like a flash of lightning, Aranyáni started to her feet, with a scream that rang through the wood, making the heart of Babhru suddenly leap into his throat. And she threw up her arms, with agony, and all at once, she sprang from her place, and darted like an arrow from a bow towards the hut. And then again, almost instantly, as he stood gazing at her in dismay, she turned sharp round, and began to run away in the opposite direction like a deer. And as if waking from a dream, he began to pursue her. And he overtook her, and laid his hand upon her shoulder, as if to say: Whither art thou hastening without looking where to go?

But when she felt him touch her, she stopped suddenly and turned, and looked at him, as if in the extremity of fear. And all at once, she began to laugh, as if she was mad, with round eyes that were filled with amazement and derision. And she exclaimed: Ha! Babhru, is it thou? But I left thee behind me in the wood. Ha! thou also art deserted, and rejected, and despised. Come, then, and let us escape very rapidly together. And she seized him by the arm, and began to drag him violently along. And she lowered her voice to a whisper, and began to speak, so quickly, that the words stumbled

Bubbles of the Foam

over one another as they rushed out of her mouth. And she said: Poor Babhru, thou art so ugly, that she could not love thee in return, quite forgetting that she was herself so ugly that nobody could love her either. But he was so beautiful, so beautiful, so beautiful that she ran away and left thee in the lurch: never even dreaming that all the other women were as silly as herself. Ah! the other women, they were so many and so cruel. There were no other women in the wood. Was it lonely, Babhru, in the wood, after she went away? Poor ugly Babhru, all alone in the wood, while we were kissing each other in the city. She used to see thee, Babhru, as she kissed him, sitting all by thyself in the wood, and weeping by thyself. She loved thee just a very little. Didst thou remember? But in the city, she feared, she feared, to see thee suddenly appear. But very likely, thou didst not know where she had gone. Thou wouldst have killed him, Babhru. Why didst thou not run after her? But they would not have admitted thee, poor Babhru, thou art so very ugly: and thou wouldst only have wandered, going round and round the palace, outside, outside, while all the time he was kissing thy lotus and trampling on its heart, inside. And yet she was his cousin, and the daughter of a king. Ha! Babhru, thou wert ignorant, and didst not know. But there were so many other women, all alike. Couldst thou even have discovered her among them all? Her eyes, her eyes were different: her eyes were dreamy, and her kisses like snowflakes. Surely it was better, after all, in the

The Desert and the Night

wood: there were no other women there. Didst thou imagine, Babhru, thou wert the only one to be dishonoured and befouled, trodden down into the mud and thrown away? But the very pools were there to teach thee, thou art so ugly, so ugly: and she was so beautiful. Couldst thou expect any better fate than hers? How could she love thee, being herself so unworthy to be loved? And he was like the very god of love, wandering in the wood. But it was she, that lost her way. He knew his way very well indeed. How could she expect, to keep him all to herself? Is not the whole world full to the very brim of women, with cruel eyes? O Babhru, why wert thou such a fool as to think one woman any better than another? Fool that she was, to think to keep him all to herself! O Babhru, thou art absolutely nothing, in comparison with him. Thou art so rude and coarse and rough, and he is more beautiful than any woman. And he was so gentle and so kind, and his kisses were so sweet. No, it was Babhru who was kind, and he was like a snake. Listen, and let me tell thee: kisses that are sweet are the bitterest of all; when other lips come in between. Thou feelest them, the other lips, between his lips and thy own. And his lips were a flower that is visited by a thousand bees. O Babhru, how canst thou know anything about it, since thy lips have never kissed anyone at all? Kiss me, poor Babhru, and thou shalt learn by experience the poison of a kiss, from lips that are sticky with the honey left by other bees.

Bubbles of the Foam

CHAPTER IV

AND as Babhru listened, gazing at her with alarm, with his reason swept as it were along in a flood of grief, and humiliation, and compassion, and sheer amazement, and hardly understanding the words flowing from her mouth like the water of a stream, she stopped short, and laid her hand upon his own. And he started at its touch, for it burned him like a flame, as if she was on fire. And she said with a smile, while the tears were running down her face: Babhru, dost thou know, Aranyáni was a creeper, supported by a noble tree? And yet somehow or other, the tree has disappeared. Who knows? for doubtless it was all eaten away within, and hollow, and as I think, the ants must have devoured it, leaving absolutely nothing but emptiness, and earth, and dust. So beautiful it seemed outside, surely the poor creeper could not tell, how base, and rotten, and horrible it was within. So when I saw it suddenly, inside, it hurt me here. And she put both her hands upon her heart, and began to sob. And then, all at once, she began again to laugh. And she said: Aye! she was a pearl, and a swan, and I know not what beside, and now she is absolutely nothing, like a broken pot. And the golden boat has perished, never so much as reaching even the shadow of the sea. Babhru, it was a lie: it was a miserable boat, all full of holes, that sank into the cold black water like a stone. Base and rotten, how could it swim, loaded with such an innumerable

The Desert and the Night

host of other women? Base, ah! who knows better than Aranyáni the agony of finding it was base. Was Aranyáni base, Babhru, dost thou know? And all the women hated each other, she and all the others; Babhru, it was hell in the golden boat. And she was worst of all, she wept, and wept, and wept, till at last they turned her out, and Chamu took her away. And then it was, I think, she died. It hurt her so to go away, she must have died; and Chamu took her and carried her away when she was dead. And she was so terrified of Chamu. Atirupa, Atirupa, save, O save me from Chamu's eyes. Babhru, beware of Chamu, for he is the very worst of all; worse even than the women. She was frightened of his laughter: it was worse, far worse, than all the laughter of the women. They pushed her from their boat, and Chamu took her. And she begged and begged and begged him only to leave her in the sand; for then she would have died, and never lived to see her father and Babhru any more. O Babhru, why didst thou not die also, before they brought her back? Chamu, Chamu, did Atirupa give you Aranyáni, to kiss her dead body on the sand?

And all at once, Babhru began to tremble like a leaf. And he exclaimed: Aranyáni, Aranyáni! And suddenly she fell down and began to kiss his feet. And then, he shuddered, and began to sob, as if a sword had run into his heart: and the sweat broke out upon his brow. And he stooped down, and lifted her violently up, saying in a low voice that shook like himself: Aranyáni, thy reason has

Bubbles of the Foam

deserted thee. Come now, and I will take thee home.

And she said with a shriek: Nay nay, for the ghost of my father is waiting there, to drive me away. Come away into the wood where it is dark. And she dragged him by the hand, and she whispered: Babhru, I have a thing to ask of thee. Wilt thou kill me with thy knife in the darkness? for otherwise I must abandon the body of my own accord.

And Babhru started, and he exclaimed, with horror: Aranyáni, art thou mad? What! should I kill thee, I, kill thee, who art my very soul?

CHAPTER V

AND she gazed at him awhile in silence, and then, there came into her eyes an anguish that was mixed with disappointment and despair. And she turned away, and murmured, as if speaking to herself, with melancholy: He also is my enemy. They will not even kill her. They keep her living, when she only asks for death, not even letting her escape, shutting her like a prisoner in the dungeon of her lonely soul. Even Chamu would not kill her: though she prayed him. He only laughed. And yet she was already dead, slain long ago, and done away, leaving nothing but a corpse.

And she stood for a moment, as if reflecting, and all at once, she turned, and looked at Babhru, with a face that was wan in the moonlight, and eyes that were filled with anxiety, and misery and pain.

The Desert and the Night

And suddenly, they changed, becoming filled with laughter and hatred and derision. And she came up close to him, as if to whisper in his ear, and suddenly she struck him in the face, with a shout of laughter. And she said, contemptuously: Thou wilt not kill me? Poor Babhru, thou hast not even yet begun to understand. Dost thou remember Aranyáni, that told thee stories, long long ago, in the wood? She is dead. Far away in the desert they took her heart, and tore it and trod it into pieces, and flung her body out, to wander in the world alone, dressed in the clothes of misery and shame. And this it is, thou wilt not kill. Thou wouldst actually keep her miserable body still alive, to live with in the torture of this wood, where Aranyáni lived long ago, to suffer every instant the horror of recollection, and to be mocked for ever by the memory of a happiness that is changed into despair. Like monkeys that go by among the trees, they found a fruit, and bit it, only to go on and leave it lying, deserted and outraged and dishonoured on the ground. Thou thinkest to find happiness in watching her dead body? Thou wilt not kill her, poor Babhru? Dost thou know what she will think of, living beside thee in the wood? Dost thou think, it will be thou? Alas, poor ugly Babhru, it will be he. And every time she sees thee, she will compare thee and him, thy body with his body, thy eyes with his eyes. Her lips would never touch thee without thinking of his own. Thou wilt only love what he rejected, and bite at the very place which the monkeys bit before thee when they

Bubbles of the Foam

threw the fruit away. The taste would be so bitter that thy love would turn to hatred in a day. She would loathe the very sight of thee, and every time she looked at thee, her eyes would tell thee, thou wert so ugly and contemptible in comparison with him. They have flung thee the relic of a life that they would not take away, merely in derision. Wilt thou live even with a victim that despises thee? Half dead and half alive, like a lizard mangled by a passing crow, and left to writhe: a deer, struck by an idle hunter, left wounded in the jungle, unable even to procure its death, to ebb away its life through burning days and black intolerable nights, eyed by the vultures sitting by. And thou wouldst be the vulture? Thou wilt only be a jackal, eating what the lion leaves. What! live beside her, knowing that another is buried in her heart. Wilt thou feed, like a dog, even on the bodies of the dead? Poor Babhru, dost thou not understand. She cast thee off and left thee for a lover that she never will forget, and living like a vampire in her body that is dead, he will utterly despise thee, laughing at thee in her eyes. Ah! Wilt thou actually wait to understand, till a little Atirupa comes, to spit, exactly like his father, in thy face?

CHAPTER VI

AND as Babhru listened, all at once the words of Chamu as he went away rose up and stood before him, as if they had lain waiting, and as it were sleeping in his soul, till roused

The Desert and the Night

into recollection by her own. And suddenly, the veil, formed by his own devotion to Aranyáni and his own self-annihilation, that hid from him the truth, was lifted from his eyes. And he saw himself suddenly as in a mirror, mocked, and scorned, and as it were a very target for the contempt and derision of Chamu, and his master, and even of herself. And his heart swelled suddenly with such a flood of shame, and anger, and the bitterness of his own inferiority, that it almost broke in two. And his face fell: and his eyes, that were fixed on Aranyáni, grew darker and ever darker, as if night at a single stride had suddenly extinguished in his heart the hope that had dawned in it at her return.

So he stood a long while, sinking, as he looked at her, deeper and deeper into the blackness of despair, and resembling one that waits in darkness for a light that still flickers to go out and disappear. And suddenly he said to himself: She is right. For fate in the form of Atirupa has destroyed her and her happiness, and mine. And he looked fixedly at Aranyáni, who was standing watching him, and waiting, as it were, for his decision: and he said: Aranyáni, I was wrong, and thou art right. And now there is no remedy but one, and it is better to be dead. And as he spoke, he took his knife, and drew it from its sheath, and waited, clutching it in his hand.

And instantly, Aranyáni uttered a cry of joy. And she came quickly and stood close to him, and she took hold with both hands of the 'choli' that

Bubbles of the Foam

covered her, and tore it violently asunder, dragging it down, till her breast was absolutely bare. And she said: See! I am ready. And so she remained, waiting, with her bosom turned up towards him in the moonlight, bared, and as it were eager, for the coming blow.

And he stood still for yet a moment, looking down upon her with melancholy eyes, in which, strange! there was not a vestige even of the shadow of any anger. And he said to himself: There, in the very middle, between those two round marble breasts, the knife shall fall. And as he hesitated, a tear rose up into his eyes, as if to bid farewell to his own happiness. And he murmured to himself: They were for him and not for thee. And he passed his left hand over his eyes, as if to clear his sight, and suddenly he raised his knife, and buried it in her heart.

CHAPTER VII

SO, then, with a sigh that was half a cry, she swayed and fell. And he never tried to catch her, but stood a long while silent, exactly where he was, looking down upon her lying still. And then, he sat down upon the ground beside her, and lifted her very gently, and set her on his lap, propping her head upon his shoulder: and he began to whisper in her ear, patting her as he did so, and rocking her to and fro, like one that soothes a child. And he said: Now, then, thy trouble is all over, and I have given thee rest, for

The Desert and the Night

it was better to be dead. And thou wilt never know what it cost me, to give thee the blow. But now thou canst go to sleep, for thou art very weary: forgetting all, and not fearing any recollection in the morning: since thy sleep will be a long one, and thou wilt never wake again. And all the evil dreams have vanished with their author, never to return; and now once more Aranyáni is herself only differing in this, that she is dead. Aye! it was better to be dead: and my blow has blotted out all the bitterness and shame. And thou didst await it, so bravely: and yet, hadst thou known, it was not thy death only, but mine, for which thou wert asking, thou wouldst have shrunk, it may be, from the blow, which, as it was, thou wert only too joyful to receive. And now very soon, I shall follow thee, by a second blow, far easier to give; for to give thee thine was very hard; so hard, that it hurt my heart a hundred times as much as thine. But in the meanwhile, we will sit together in the moonlight, just for a very little while, and talk, as of old. Only thou canst not tell me stories, and call me Bruin, any more. Thou didst give thyself, alive, to others: but thou art mine, now that thou art dead: and that is enough. And this is, as it were, my marriage night. And think not that I bear thee any grudge, for the words spoken at random in thy madness, or even for the blow; for that is nothing, from such a little hand as thine. Come, let me see it, for maybe it hurt itself more than it hurt me. Ha! dost thou remember the very story that thou didst tell me thyself, about the sage? And now, who knows

Bubbles of the Foam

better than myself, that a blow hurts the giver more than the receiver? For no one ever hurt himself so much as I did, when I gave thee thy blow. It was not to return blow for blow, that I gave it. Ah! it is not thou, against whom I bear a grudge, for all thy words and thy little irritable blow; but it is thy vile lover and his viler instrument, who have ruined thee, and brought about thy death.

And then, all at once, he uttered an exclamation. And he stopped short, and set her down upon the ground, and stood up. For suddenly, as if for the very first time, the injury done to her by Atirupa and his follower rose up, and took him as it were by the throat.

And as he stood thinking, all at once he began to tremble unawares, with rage. And he exclaimed: Aha! Atirupa, I have remembered, and only just in time: I am not dead yet. And he looked down at Aranyáni, as she lay. And he said: Aranyáni, forgive me! Well didst thou call me fool. For I came within an ace of following thee into the other world, leaving thee unavenged. But now I see, that before I go, there is other work to do, on thy behalf. And now, then, I will guarantee, that it shall be done, very soon, and very well. Then, and not sooner, will I die, when I have shown the murderers of Aranyáni that she has left behind her arms a little longer, and hands a little harder, than her own. Aha! Atirupa, wait for a little while! And then shalt thou discover that the ghost of Aranyáni has abandoned her body, only to enter

The Desert and the Night

mine: just on purpose to caress thee, for the very last time.

And he stooped down, and laid his great arm beside hers, as if to compare them, and he laughed. And then, very gently, he lifted her, in those strong arms, and began to carry her away, rejoicing in his burden, like one that carries in his arms his newly-wedded wife. So he went on in the moonlit wood, till he came at last to her home. And there he carried her in, and laid her down very gently on a bed of leaves. And then, with hesitation, he kissed her softly on the brow, whispering as he did so: Thou didst bid me kiss thee, in thy madness, and now, it cannot hurt thee: though I would have gladly given many lives to kiss thee, for the first time and the last, before. But thy kisses were for others.

And all at once, he began to sob, as if something in his soul, that had till then supported it, had suddenly given way. And he began to wail, wringing his hands, and tearing his hair, and crying, Aranyánt, Aranyánt: throwing himself to and fro, and striding wildly up and down, as if his heart, appalled by the blank horror of its own loneliness, were struggling to escape. And then, after a while, as if exhausted, and as it were overcome by the sense of the futility of his lamentation, he ceased, as suddenly as he began, and remained for a long time standing absolutely still, looking out through the open door into the wood, that lay silent, as if on purpose to sympathise with the other dead silence there within.

Bubbles of the Foam

And at last, he turned. And he looked for a moment at Aranyáni, and he stooped, and took the knife, which all the while remained buried in her breast, and drew it suddenly away, and turned, and went out, and fastened very carefully the door.

And he stood awhile in the moonlight, looking at his knife. And then, he put it, just as it was, back into the sheath: saying to himself: Her heart's red blood shall dry upon the blade, till I mix it with his own.

CHAPTER VIII

BUT in the meanwhile Atirupa, away in his capital in the desert, continued as before, having utterly forgotten Aranyáni, and never thinking of her even in a dream; busy, like a mad bee, only in making onslaughts on other flowers, and leaving behind him those already rifled of their honey, neglected and buried in oblivion, like the faded leaves of a dead red lotus lying at the very bottom of a forest pool.

And then, by the decree of destiny, there came at last a day, when he sat with some of his retainers, according to his custom, drinking wine and passing time easily in his palace hall. And there came in, all at once, a keeper of the gate. And she¹ said: Maháráj, there has come to the door an old 'sannyási,' demanding admission to the presence, and refusing to go away. And it may be, he is mad.² For he says he is a deity, who

¹ They appear to have been women, very often, in mediæval or ancient India. ² And yet, not so much in India as in

The Desert and the Night

wishes to renew his old acquaintance with another. And now, the Mahárájá is the judge.

And Atirupa laughed, and he said: If he is a deity indeed, why is he waiting at a gate? And yet, who knows? For the deity presents himself in many forms, and who knows how or when? But go thou and tell the holy man to give thee some evidence, or token, of his divinity, and then we shall see.

So, then, after a while, that 'pratihári' came again. And she said: Maháráj, thus said the sann-yási: Go and tell the Mahárájá, that I am the God of Death, yet not just of any death, but only of his own. For long ago, I burned his body, with fire from my eye; and now I am curious to see, whether the new body he has got is, as I have heard, still better than the old.¹

And hearing this, Atirupa was delighted, and he exclaimed: The evidence is good; and I recognise the deity of this well-mannered Byrági: for as it seems, he is a connoisseur. So bring him in to see me. And he said to himself: It may be he is an emissary from one of the neighbouring Kings,² covering his policy with folly: or he may be the go-between of some assignation: or even if he be nothing of the kind, what harm?

So then, after a little while, that sann-yási entered, looking like a very 'shála' tree in height. Europe. Even now, incarnations of deity might be found all over India. ¹ The point of the flattery lies, of course, in the insinuation that Atirupa was the God of Love. ² All these 'sann-yásís,' 'byrágís,' 'gosáwís,' were as a rule wandering scoundrels who had, and have, much to do with politics.

Bubbles of the Foam

And he was smeared all over with ashes, from his head to his feet, with absolutely nothing on, but a yellow rag around his waist, and a rosary of 'ak-sha' beads around his neck, which resembled that of a bull. And his face was almost hidden in the masses of his grey and very dirty hair and beard, which were matted, and tied in large knots, above and below. And his eyes, which were extraordinarily bright, rested on Atirupa, as he entered, with an expression which, like that of a wild animal, was half timidity and half ferocity, mixed with keen examination: and he trembled a very little, as he stood, as if with fear. And Atirupa gazed at him with curiosity and wonder, and he exclaimed, as if in jest: O Maheshwara, there cannot be a doubt of thy divinity: for surely, if thou wert not Maheshwara himself, he might be jealous of thee, for thy height and thy ashes and thy hair, and that third eye painted in the very middle of thy brow, looking as if it were just about to open and consume me again.

Then that strange old sannyási laughed like a hyæna, and he said: Maháráj, be not afraid any longer of my eye: for this time I shall consume thee with flame of quite another kind, in the form of a kiss that I have brought thee, from a beauty almost equal to thy own, with eyes that resemble the gazelle, and lips that are redder than her own heart's blood.

Then said Atirupa: Sannyási, I know that a message carried by thee would be of a value pro-

The Desert and the Night

portioned to its bearer; and tell me quickly what it is, for I am curious to learn.

And the sannyási looked at him significantly, as it were with a wink of the eyes. And he said: O deity of Love, who knows better than thyself that a high caste lady, when she goes to an assignation, wraps herself up, and fastens her bangles and her anklets, to prevent them even from jingling? And there are words, and names, unfit to be heard, by any other ears than thine. Were I to speak, among all these ears, thou wouldst be the very first to punish me for my indiscretion.

Then Atirupa was filled with curiosity, and he said to himself: It is as I thought, and he is an emissary, and one, moreover, well suited to his task. And he turned, and exclaimed: Chamu, take every one away. And then, the sannyási looked attentively at Chamu, as they went. And he said, in a low voice, to Atirupa: Maháráj, for I have heard of Chamu, that he is thy 'widushaka,'¹ let him be at hand: for with thy permission, he and I will settle all the details of this negotiation, as soon as it has received thy own approval.

And Atirupa said: Chamu, be ready, when I call. And when they were all gone, he exclaimed with impatience: Now then, O sannyási, to thy business, without any more delay. Who is thy employer? And the sannyási said: Aranyáni: and if thou hast forgotten her, she has not forgotten thee. But having abandoned her own body, she

¹ As we should say: Père Joseph, or 'âme-damnée.'

Bubbles of the Foam

has entered mine, to give thee, as I said, the kiss of death.

And then, as Atirupa stared at him with amazement, that sannyási leaped upon him, with a yell, and seized him, and threw him suddenly on his back. And he knelt on his throat, like a very mountain, and taking from his waist a knife, he plunged it, with blows like those of a carpenter that hammers in a nail, over and over again into his heart.

And then, as the retainers came running in, summoned as though on purpose, by his own yell, with Chamu at their head, he started to his feet. And as they looked towards him, lo! that sannyási began to laugh. And he put up suddenly his hands, and seized, with one, his hair, and with the other, his beard, and tore them from his head.

And as Chamu stopped short, gazing at him with stupor and recognition, he stood for a single instant absolutely still, as if to let him see. And then, he leaned suddenly towards him, and he lifted his finger and he whispered very low: Hark! Dost thou not hear Aranyáni calling, out of the other world? So now, then, we will go together, to seek her, along the great road. And he threw himself suddenly on Chamu, and took him by the throat, with huge hands whose fingers resembled the roots of a 'wata' tree.

And as he felt the throat of that ill-doer in his hands, there came over him like a flood madness, that resembled the intoxication compounded of delight, and fury, and despair, as if his life-long

The Desert and the Night

devotion to Aranyáni, and his wrath at her ruin and his own, had waited till that very moment to mingle with the rapture of revenge, and filling his soul with the ecstasy of the strength of a giant, had then become concentrated to pass into his hands. And as he squeezed, he muttered, not knowing what he said: Laugh, weasel, laugh now at Aranyáni. And in the meantime all the others, to whom he paid no more attention than as if they were not there, seeing absolutely nothing before him but the eyes of Chamu that were starting from his head, fell upon him all together in a body, like a swarm of bees, and stung him, as it were, to death, exactly as they chose, cutting him to pieces with swords and knives. But for all that they did, they could not loose his hands, which remained just as they were, locked like an iron ring around the throat to which they clung, as if his will still animated them, even after he was dead.

So it came about, just as he predicted; and those two very bitter enemies went together, and as it were, hand-in-hand, into the other world. And Chamu, with his master Atirupa, went into other bodies. But the soul of Babhru entered, for his crime, into that body of a camel lying yonder, which perished, as I told thee to begin with, in the desert long ago.

And then, the Moony-crested stopped. And after a while, the Daughter of the Snow said softly: Alas! for these unhappy mortal women, who suffer at the hands of evil-minded lovers, such intoler-

Bubbles of the Foam

able wrong, and woe. And yet, as I think, poor Babhru deserved rather to be forgiven altogether, or even to be actually rewarded, rather than punished by the body of a camel, for treating those two ill-doers even better than they merited, for such outrageous crime.

Then said Maheshwara, looking at her with affection: O Daughter of the Snow, thou resemblest every other woman, judging by thy own pity and compassion, and the emotion aroused in thy soul by the particular misfortune of a solitary case, not taking into any consideration the constitution of the world. And this is a merit and a beauty in thee, and yet it is altogether wrong. For Babhru suffered as a consequence of acts committed in a former birth, the circumstances of which thou dost not know. And moreover, even so, he was culpable and presumptuous, in taking on himself a vengeance to which even Aranyáni did not urge him, not knowing that punishment far more terrible than his was waiting for those criminals, without his interference. And he should have left Aranyáni's vindication to the deity, who knew what was necessary far better than himself, and had his eye upon it all. For there is no retribution so just, or so sure, or so adequate, or awful, as that which evil-doers lay upon themselves, in the form of their own ill-deeds, which dog them like a shadow clinging to their heels, from body to body, through birth after birth, till the very last atom of guilt has passed through the furnace of expiation, and the very last item of their debt to everlasting

The Desert and the Night

Yama has been weighed in his scales, and struck from the account, and utterly redeemed.

And then, that Lord of the Moony Tire took his darling in his arms, and set her on his lap: and they rose up and floated away together like a cloud to their home on the snowy peak. But the bones of that camel remained alone, lying still in the sand, till the moon got up and gazed at them with wonder, looking down from the sky, as if mistaking them for a reflection of himself, looking back at him with white and silent laughter from the blackness of the earth, and saying as it were: By the help of thy beams, I am whiter than thyself. And the night-wind rushed over them, scattering over them oblivion, in the form of a cloud of its plaything, the ocean of the sand, and danced round and fled away with a wail into the desert, with a music that resembled the moan of the world for the victims of the waste.

HERE ENDS BUBBLES OF THE FOAM,
TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL
MANUSCRIPT BY F. W. BAIN, RE-
PRINTED, BY ARRANGEMENT WITH
MESSRS. METHUEN & CO. LTD., IN
THE RICCARDI PRESS FOUNT, BY
CHARLES T. JACOBI, AND PUBLISHED
FOR THE MEDICI SOCIETY LTD.

BY PHILIP LEE WARNER
AT VII GRAFTON ST.

LONDON, W.

MDCCCC

XIV

**THE INDIAN STORIES
OF F. W. BAIN**

**A Digit of the Moon
The Descent of the Sun
A Heifer of the Dawn
In the Great God's Hair
A Draught of the Blue
An Essence of the Dusk
An Incarnation of the Snow
A Mine of Faults
The Ashes of a God
Bubbles of the Foam
A Syrup of the Bees**



